

Leo Strauss's Critique of Martin Heidegger

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Abstract

While remaining rooted in a comparison of some of the primary texts of the thinkers under scrutiny, my thesis also discusses several issues which arise in the mutual consideration of Heidegger and Strauss, specifically the questions of the ontological and political status of nature, the problem of ‘first philosophy,’ and the method by which to interpret philosophical texts, as well as a continuous analysis of Strauss’s appellation of ‘modern,’ as opposed to ‘ancient,’ and ‘religious,’ as opposed to ‘philosophical,’ to Heidegger’s thought. I first consider every moment in Strauss’s corpus where he discusses Heidegger’s thought. From this discussion, I identify four main lines of critique which may be extracted from Strauss’s writings on Heidegger. Then, I turn to Heidegger’s texts themselves in order to determine if Strauss’s critique indeed finds purchase there, addressing each of the lines of critique in turn. Finally, I consider Strauss and Heidegger in tandem, in light of the three questions identified above. I show that many of what Strauss determines to be Heidegger’s errors arose as a result of the way that Heidegger read ancient philosophical texts, and I suggest that Strauss’s approach, i.e., to consider the possible esoteric meaning of a text, in fact permits the reader to access an interpretation that is truer to the textual phenomena. This claim, however, is not intended to obscure the remarkable similarities between each thinker’s respective interpretive methods. I conclude that Strauss’s critique of Heidegger, vehement as it is, also indicates Strauss’s dependence on Heidegger’s thought for the inspiration of Strauss’s own philosophical project. The relation between Strauss and Heidegger, then, remains profoundly ambiguous.

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General Introduction

Wollen wir die Gegenwart so wie sie ist, erkennen, frei von den herrschenden Auffassungen, die wir erst prüfen müssen, so müssen wir allererst von der Gegenwart frei sein. Diese Freiheit fällt uns nicht in den Schoss, wir müssen sie uns erobern.

—Leo Strauss, “Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart,” 1930

...wir uns selber nicht von der Modernität befreien können, wenn wir die Modernität nicht verstehen.

—Leo Strauss, letter to Karl Löwith, 21 December 1951

The only question of importance of course is the question whether Heidegger’s teaching is true or not. But the very question is deceptive because it is silent about the question of competence—of who is competent to judge...The more I understand what Heidegger is aiming at the more I see how much still escapes me.

—Leo Strauss, “Existentialism,” lecture given in February 1956

This thesis is an attempt first to describe in detail, and then to examine critically, Leo Strauss’s critique of Martin Heidegger. Its method is primarily exegetical and tentative, and is therefore not an attempt to posit *the* understanding or conclusive reading of the complex relation between Strauss and Heidegger. Rather, its purpose is to raise properly the philosophical questions which necessarily arise when one considers the two thinkers in tandem. These questions concern the foundation of both the history and the practice of philosophy, touching on such themes as the relations between theory and practice, philosophy and political life, and political theorizing and ontology. Thus, I propose, an analysis of these two thinkers can provide clarificatory tools even for those to whom Strauss and Heidegger, for various reasons, remain anathema.

This thesis, it must be said from the beginning, is written from a perspective rooted in Strauss’s thought, although it is, I hope, a skeptical and nonpartisan perspective. I leave answering the question of whether this is possible or not to the disciples of both thinkers, disciples from whom I wish to distance this project. Nevertheless, the thesis is guided by

two of Strauss's overarching themes, namely the 'theologico-political problem' and the 'quarrel between the ancients and the moderns.'¹ I believe that an examination of Strauss's writings on Heidegger, as well as an analysis of Heidegger's writings themselves in response to Strauss's critical remarks, permits a clear view both of these problems, and how each thinker's respective work is to be understood in relation to these problems.

Up to the time of this writing, only essays and chapters of books, not to mention paragraphs and brief remarks in footnotes, have addressed the relation between Strauss and Heidegger. Thus, I also propose this thesis to be worthwhile for purely scholarly reasons. Both Heidegger and Strauss are among the most important thinkers of the 20th century as determined at least by their respective influence, for good or for ill. There are few thinkers who continue to be as controversial philosophically and politically as these two, and there are few thinkers who have attracted such large groups of disciples, who have subsequently influenced not only philosophy but arguably the direction of studies in the humanities, in the social sciences, and even, so it is claimed, concrete political life. These reasons, important as they might be, are not adequate to justify a prolonged philosophical comparison, however. Instead, I quote, hopefully with due consideration of hubris, one of Strauss's most important passages concerning the task of the student of philosophy:

...liberal education consists in listening to the conversation among the greatest minds. But here we are confronted with the overwhelming difficulty that this conversation does not take place without our help—that in fact we must bring about that conversation. The greatest minds utter monologues. We must

¹ The essential qualities of these two themes, perhaps through their identification and elaboration Strauss's highest and lasting contributions to philosophical discussion, will become clearer as the argument of this thesis progresses. As an introductory remark that runs the risk of intractable perplexity, I limit myself merely to state that the first theme deals with the problem of the tension, as Strauss sees it, between reason and revelation as two competing and mutually refuting sources of morality, and the consequent political problem inherent thereof. The second theme deals with the differences between the ancient and modern approaches to this problem, as well as the differences between the ancient and modern methods or modes of philosophical expression.

transform their monologues into a dialogue, their ‘side by side’ into a ‘together.’ (LAM, 7)²

I leave the question of the relative stature of Strauss and Heidegger for a more partisan situation. The ‘first’ question that follows from this passage, then, is, why these two thinkers in particular? If we leave behind the contemporary controversies and the decided camps and positions, i.e., if we turn to Heidegger’s and Strauss’s writings themselves, we find philosophical analyses of the highest order, ones which engage the tradition in radical ways that challenge centuries, perhaps millennia, of philosophical speculation. And, as the dialogue between Heidegger and Strauss was decidedly one-sided, in the sense that Strauss wrote on Heidegger but not the inverse, the conversation demands to be enacted.

Strauss was educated in the same intellectual period in which Heidegger had arguably his most decisive influence, not to mention the fact that Strauss attended Heidegger’s early lectures on Aristotle and, from this brief exposure, believed him to be the most profound thinker in generations, German or otherwise.³ Philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Karl Löwith, and Jacob Klein, all of whom students of Heidegger and all of whom engaging in critical debates of varying depth with Strauss, make up some of the most important examples of attempts to come to terms with, or to expand upon and carry forward, Heidegger’s thought.⁴ It is precisely this tradition in which I wish to situate Strauss, and hence this thesis can be seen as an attempt to interpret Strauss in more of a

² See the first section of the Bibliography of this thesis for the list of acronyms I use in reference to Strauss’s and Heidegger’s publications.

³ Strauss attended Heidegger’s lecture course in 1922 at Freiburg, “without understanding a word, but sensed that he dealt with something of the utmost importance to man as man. I understood something on one occasion: when he interpreted the beginning of the *Metaphysics*. I had never heard nor seen such a thing—such a thorough and intensive interpretation of a philosophic text. On my way home I visited Rosenzweig and said to him that compared to Heidegger, Max Weber, till then regarded by me as the incarnation of the spirit of science and scholarship, was an orphan child” (JPCM, 461).

⁴ I leave out certain students of Heidegger, most notably Hannah Arendt, from this list simply due to the fact that there is no evidence of Strauss’s consideration of them. See, e.g., Ronald Beiner, “Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue” (*Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (May 1990), 238-254) for an exploration of Strauss’s (non-)relation to Arendt’s thought.

‘Continental’ way. This fraught appellation is sure to arouse suspicion from both promoters and detractors of Strauss, but I believe that it is not possible to understand the impetus for Strauss’s overall project without taking into consideration both the intellectual milieu in which he received his training and, I argue, the initial set of problems, ones with which he continued to wrestle for the rest of his life, which were determined by that milieu.⁵

It is also important to consider the two thinkers in tandem because scholars of Strauss, both friendly and antipathetic, have recognized the importance of Heidegger to understand fully Strauss’s position. Strauss’s writings engage with Heidegger and his thought repeatedly, from early letters addressed to some of the best-known thinkers who arose out of the academic situation which Heidegger prepared in Weimar-era Germany, to Strauss’s late writings concerning the problem of Socrates, a problem to which all of Strauss’s writings were arguably intended as a response.⁶ Hence, a considered and in-depth discussion of the entirety of Strauss’s engagement with Heidegger, i.e., an examination of all moments in Strauss’s corpus where Heidegger is discussed, is crucial to understand Strauss’s position on a variety of the subjects which served as his guiding lights: the question of ancient versus modern philosophy, the question of philosophy versus politics, and the question of reason versus revelation as two competing bases for the way of living well. I will return to this list of problems in a moment.

⁵ This is not to say that I wish to interpret Strauss as dependent upon that milieu, or as ‘a child of his times.’ I differ in this respect from several recent commentators on Strauss, most notable of which being Eugene Sheppard (*Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2006). It is always important to consider those historical figures to whom a thinker responded, to be sure, but—and here I take a methodological position against the general tenets of historicism—great thinkers always transcend their times. This is evinced by the simple fact that their thought continues to be relevant in eras of which they could not have had any possible knowledge.

⁶ Here I uphold Eugene Miller’s position: “[i]t is important to recognize that Strauss’s entire account of the history of political philosophy is framed as a reply to radical historicism. This fact is easy to overlook because Strauss chooses to remain silent, for the most part, about the identity of the contemporary thinker whom he intends above all to answer. That thinker is Martin Heidegger” (“Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophers*, eds. Anthony de Crespigny and Kenneth R. Minogue (London: Methuen, 1976), 96).

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, an examination of Strauss and Heidegger in tandem allows one to see the important differences between certain of their remarkably similar positions and diagnoses concerning the contemporary situation both of philosophy and of politics, not to mention of human existence in light of the two. Strauss and Heidegger both consider their philosophical endeavours as responses to what each thinker calls the ‘crisis of the West;’ both thinkers see certain aspects of this crisis instantiated in the triumph and the danger of modern (physical) science as the perhaps final way to understand human beings and the whole which they inhabit; and both thinkers suggest a critical reexamination of ancient philosophy, one purportedly free of generations, perhaps centuries, of scholarly sedimentation as a means by which to come to terms with that crisis.

As the reader may by now have surmised, much of the impetus for this project has been drawn from Strauss’s philosophical position. This, it is hoped, will not colour the reader’s approach to the following thesis. The controversial nature of Strauss’s position in regards to political life, allegedly serving as the basis of certain contemporary political perspectives and movements, has been discussed in great detail in other places and constitutes argumentative waters which I wish to avoid.⁷ Likewise, the cyclical nature of the ‘Heidegger controversy’ seemed to have crested yet again in recent months.⁸ These controversies are not the subject of this thesis, however. The most important element of each thinker is the possibility he raises to ask philosophical questions in a radical way. It is

⁷ For an extreme recent example, see William H.F. Altman, “The Alpine Limits of Jewish Thought: Leo Strauss, National Socialism, and *Judentum ohne Gott*,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2009), 1-46, as well as his other recent publications on Strauss. A book on Leo Strauss and National Socialism entitled *The German Stranger* is forthcoming at the time of this writing.

⁸ For an example equally extreme as the one concerning Strauss from the above footnote, see Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*, Michael B. Smith, trans. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

hoped that the following thesis will contribute to providing a better ground from which to approach these questions.

As Strauss's thought is the impetus for this thesis, it is necessary to describe the background problems which continuously inform the following discussion. As was mentioned above, Strauss constantly returns to questions of the relations or conflicts between, e.g., philosophy and politics, Athens and Jerusalem, and ancient and modern philosophical positions. All of these problems, I will argue, are distillable to one specific one: what Strauss calls 'the theologico-political problem.' This problem has several facets, but ultimately these facets centre on the question of *the best way to live*. Philosophy, for Strauss fundamentally the quest for the best way to live, is thus in immediate opposition to the positions of religion and political life, as both of which claim to have an actual answer to the question of the best way to live. Philosophy is thus in permanent discord both with the contemporaneous political situation in which it finds itself, and, more fundamentally, with a religious position which claims to have a description of the true and eternal nature of the whole, namely that it was created at a particular moment by divine power. Strauss claims that, starting from the time of his early studies on Spinoza and Hobbes, "the theologico-political problem has remained *the* theme of my investigations" (JPCM, 453). According to Strauss's understanding, then, his writings after approximately 1934 must be understood in light of this overarching theme, including his writings on Heidegger. In light of Strauss's spirit of zeteticism,⁹ however, it must be emphasized that while Heidegger's

⁹ By this I follow Strauss's understanding of the term, "skeptic in the original sense of the term," which for him means "neither dogmatic nor skeptic [in the sense, presumably, of permanently 'withholding judgement' in the way that, e.g., Sextus Empiricus means it—DT]" (OT, 196). Zeteticism is thus, for Strauss, the essence of philosophy as he understands it, or, expressed in other words, "nothing but genuine awareness of the problems, i.e., of the fundamental and comprehensive problems" (OT, 196). The zetetic philosopher *par excellence* for Strauss was Socrates, who avoided the transition to the 'sectarian' that occurs "at the moment at which the 'subjective certainty' of a solution becomes stronger than [the philosopher's] awareness of the

thought is viewed in accordance with the structure of this problem, and for Strauss at least his thought does not exactly fall on the side of philosophy, Strauss does not thereby wish to refute Heidegger's position. For Strauss, "the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger" ("Existentialism, 305).¹⁰ Heidegger's thought, then, must be confronted and understood properly, not 'destroyed' or refuted beyond doubt. Strauss's and Heidegger's respective positions, for Strauss at least, are in permanent tension, and Heidegger's thought thus casts light on Strauss's attempt to recover the theologico-political problem as unsolved—thereby indicating Strauss's non-modern position.

For Strauss, the theologico-political problem can only be understood in light of the secondary problem, the conflict between ancient and modern approaches to it. In Strauss's words, "[a] philosophy which believes it can refute the possibility of revelation—and a philosophy which does not believe that: this is the real meaning of *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*" ("Reason and Revelation," in Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 177). Heidegger's thought, as we will see, takes up certain themes and questions concerning human existence, but understood, according to Strauss, in a way fundamentally similar to that of religious life. As we will also see, Heidegger claims to excise the religious, or 'ontic' content of such themes, thereby leaving them empty and hence understandable as part of the ontological structure of *Dasein*, or the specifically human form of existence. This, for Strauss, is exactly the problem: a philosophical position which does not understand itself at its core to be a challenge to a religious position misunderstands the relation between philosophy and religion as sources for their respective

problematic character of that solution" (OT, 196). If Strauss truly holds to this understanding of philosophy, and I believe that he does, it is impossible to say that he ultimately wishes to 'refute' Heidegger's position, even if Strauss's own position is, or seems to be, entirely opposed to it.

¹⁰ Strauss is careful here to distinguish between philosophers and thinkers, a distinction which Heidegger also upholds.

conceptions of the best way to live. More specifically, Heidegger's thought ultimately does not free itself from religious tendencies, because it does not begin from the position that the ultimate question which human beings face, and which philosophical investigations must confront, is "human guidance or divine guidance" (NRH, 74). For Strauss, Heidegger holds the modern position that the tension between philosophy and religion is unimportant to investigate, because philosophy is most fundamentally concerned with analysis of 'the whole' or *Sein* apart from religious interference with that analysis. Heidegger thus believes religion to have been, if not refuted then at least made permissible to be set aside for the purposes of philosophical investigation. Under Strauss's rubric, then, Heidegger is a modern, in opposition to Strauss's ancient and zetetic position which takes revelation as *the* serious challenge to philosophy.

Much as Heidegger claims not to have 'discovered' or 'invented' the question of the meaning of *Sein* but instead simply to have made it prominent again, I believe that Strauss thought himself not to have invented these problems. Instead, they were made evident to him from the texts he examined, specifically through the methodological approach to reading those texts. As we will see, Heidegger's adoption of particularly modern methods of reading philosophical texts, even though this was contrary to his expressed intention, was the reason why he could not grasp the peculiar character of texts written in a political-philosophical way. This approach, then, conditioned the rest of his thought and the problems which he thereby unearthed, and the subsequent problems raised—namely the two thinkers' differing philosophical relations to political life, religious faith, and the history of philosophy—cast light on this thesis as a whole and are discussed throughout.

Chapter 1 is an exhaustive analysis of every instance in Strauss's published works which makes reference to Heidegger's thought. This chapter therefore consists mainly of a

close reading of Strauss's texts, in order to determine his exact position vis-à-vis Heidegger. The result of this chapter's analysis is four related lines of critique, which, taken together, constitute Strauss's overall critique of Heidegger.¹¹ Chapter 2 is an excursion into Heidegger's texts themselves, in order to determine how, as well as if, Strauss's critiques have textual justification. I end this chapter by explaining how it is possible for Heidegger to avoid some aspects of Strauss's critique, but ultimately Heidegger is shown to be both fundamentally modern in his thinking, and, due to the religious elements present in his thought, ultimately not in a position to understand adequately the theologico-political problem. Chapter 3 recapitulates the conclusions of the first two chapters in order to set the stage for an analysis of certain points of convergence, as well as divergence, between Heidegger's and Strauss's respective projects. Following from this recapitulation, I thus address Heidegger's and Strauss's respective understandings of 1) nature, 2) 'first' philosophy, and 3) the method or approach by which to read a philosophical text. I conclude the chapter with reversing the order of these points of convergence and divergence, ultimately to show that it was Heidegger's approach to reading Plato and Aristotle which both permitted Strauss to approach these thinkers without the obfuscatory apparatus of centuries of traditional scholarship, and which ultimately blinded Heidegger himself to the way in which political philosophers wrote in the past, namely that they possessed two distinct teachings directed at two different audiences. In the end, then, it is Strauss's recovery of the conception of esoteric writing which, properly understood,

¹¹ Here I must acknowledge the work of Ian Loadman, whose unpublished conference paper, "Historical Sickness: Strauss and Heidegger" (2008) identifies "three distinct critiques of Heidegger in Strauss," referring specifically to 1) historicity, 2) a mistaken understanding of the history of philosophy, and 3) the problem of the religious tendencies Strauss believes to see in Heidegger's thought. However, Loadman does not situate his analysis specifically in the context of the theologico-political problem and the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns as Strauss understands them; consequently, it is not possible for him to understand the ultimate basis and justification, from Strauss's own perspective, for Strauss's view of Heidegger.

indicates his greatest difference from Heidegger, while at the same time indicating how much he in fact owes to Heidegger's previous philosophical *Destruktion*. This debt persists even when Strauss's vehement moral criticism of Heidegger's position, also known throughout Strauss's writings as 'radical historicism,' is taken into account. My conclusion, then, speculates about this criticism and its consequences for how we should ultimately view Strauss, both philosophically and politically.

1. Analysis of Strauss's Critique of Heidegger

The matter of Strauss's relationship to Heidegger's thinking is one of the philosophical issues most in need of being raised in order to arrive at a proper understanding of Strauss's thought. The dismissal of one, for whatever reason, results in a fundamental dilution of the other.

—Alan Udoff, "On Leo Strauss"

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will consist of an examination of every instance in Strauss's published writings where he examines either Heidegger, or 'radical historicism,' which for Strauss is Heidegger's thinking by another name.¹ This is done with the goal to circumscribe, at the end of this chapter, what I will argue is Strauss's overall critique of Heidegger. I have chosen to present Strauss's writings on Heidegger in chronological form, in order both to indicate the development and deepening of the critique of Heidegger from Strauss's early career to his later works, and also to show the overall continuity of this critique. Also, this form is useful if one simultaneously considers the various periods of Heidegger's career. Strauss rarely comments on specific texts other than *Sein und Zeit*, but in accordance with the following chapter it would be possible to compare particular moments in Heidegger's career with Strauss's comments composed simultaneously.

It is possible to divide Strauss's critique of Heidegger into three distinct phases, corresponding to his continuously deepening encounter with Heidegger. I have named them the following: 1) Orientation; 2) Opposition; and 3) Socratic Return. These three phases correspond to important developments in Strauss's own thought, specifically in relation to the two recurring themes indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the 'theologico-

¹ See the letter from Strauss to Alexander Kojève, dated June 26, 1950: "I have once again been dealing with Historicism, that is to say, with Heidegger, the only radical historicist" (published in OT, 251). Strauss is making explicit reference to his preparation of the publication of *Natural Right and History* (first published edition, 1953, based on lectures given in 1949) here.

political problem' and the 'quarrel between the ancients and the moderns.' Strauss's understanding of these problems is, I will show, reflected in his understanding and critique of Heidegger.² In the first phase, Strauss's path of thinking is determined by the philosophical possibility which Heidegger had initiated. In a sense, then, Heidegger 'oriented' Strauss's philosophical trajectory in this period. The second phase is characterized by Strauss's explicit statements in opposition to Heidegger and radical historicism, statements which are countered by several instances of praise for Heidegger's thought. The third and final phase consists of Strauss's turn to writing on Socrates and the problems which Strauss believed Socratic philosophy to identify and address; Strauss's writings about Heidegger from this period reflect this preoccupation.

1.2 1922-1935: Orientation

Strauss encountered Heidegger's teaching for the first time in the summer semester of 1922 at Freiburg University,³ so it is appropriate to begin my exegesis here. Heidegger presented both a seminar and a lecture that semester. The seminar was titled

² In presenting Strauss's relation to Heidegger as possessing three distinct stages, I follow the precedent of Allan Bloom's description of Strauss's career (*Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960-1990* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 246-249). This is not to say that Strauss's encounters with Heidegger's thought determined the stages; rather, Strauss's own understanding at each stage influenced his respective approach to Heidegger. Strauss himself states that he underwent a "change of orientation" (SCR, 31) around the time of the publication of his critique of Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* in 1932. John Gunnell claims that "[t]his change involved, in part, the idea, which was largely product of his encounter with Heidegger, that philosophy was bound up with historical deconstruction" ("Strauss Before Straussianism: Reason, Revelation, and Nature," in *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, eds. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1994), 119. Gunnell goes too far in identifying Strauss's suggestion for 'historical studies' with Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion*, however. Strauss's 'historical studies' are, for him, necessary to escape the 'second cave' of historicism in order to return to the natural first position of human beings where philosophy proper may begin; Heidegger's *Destruktion* is intended to show the absolute relation to temporality which the various concepts of *Sein* throughout the history of philosophy possess. The consequences of this differing intention will be discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

³ Strauss indicates as much in a letter to Karl Löwith dated June 3, 1964, and published in GS 3, 690.

“Phänomeologische Übungen für Anfänger im Anschluß an Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* II, 2. Untersuchung” (“Phenomenological Exercises for Beginners in Connection with Husserl, *Logical Investigations* II, 2nd Investigation”), and the lecture course was titled “Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Ontologie und Logik” (“Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Ontology and Logic”). Strauss evidently attended at least the lecture course, one which left a lasting impression on his philosophical approach.⁴ I note this only for historical context, however, as before 1940, the only published evidence available concerning Strauss’s critique of Heidegger is a series of references scattered across letters and notes, compiled in Strauss’s *Gesammelte Schriften*.⁵

Strauss’s first writings on Heidegger appear in letters to Gerhard Krüger which date from the early 1930s, during a period of Strauss’s career immediately after the time when he was heavily influenced by Nietzsche.⁶ Strauss, in the midst of study on Hobbes, responds to the, at that time, recent publication of *Sein und Zeit* by noting that “an adequate atheistic interpretation of the Bible is first allowed to be possible by Heidegger’s interpretation of Dasein” (Letter to Krüger, January 7, 1930, GS 3, 380, my translation,

⁴ “I had heard Heidegger’s interpretation of certain sections of Aristotle. Sometime later I heard Werner Jaeger in Berlin interpret the same texts. Charity compels me to limit the comparison to the remark that there was no comparison” (Strauss, “Existentialism,” 304).

⁵ Eugene Sheppard makes some interesting comparisons between Heidegger’s and Strauss’s works from this period, claiming that Strauss silently incorporates Heideggerian themes in his writings on Jewish issues, specifically “how insight and meaning are conditioned on the *horizon* and *orientation* of the finite existence of the concerned interpreter” (*Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 39). Certainly Strauss was influenced by Heidegger at this point in his career, but there is no incontrovertible textual evidence of a wholesale ‘incorporation’ of Heidegger’s method, however. I discuss Strauss’s possible adoption of Heideggerian themes in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶ “I can now say that between my 22nd and 30th year, Nietzsche had so governed and bewitched me that I believed literally everything I understood of him—and that is only a part of his teaching, as I see thanks to your work” (Letter to Karl Löwith, June 23, 1935, GS 3, 648, my translation).

emphasis removed⁷). Strauss believes this to be the case due to the fact that in Heidegger, one finds the “perfection” of an “other will against the religion of revelation [*Offenbarungs-Religion*]” (Letter to Krüger, 7 January 7, 1930, GS 3, 380, my translation, emphasis removed). This perfection is expressed through Heidegger’s conception of the call of conscience (*Ruf des Gewissens*), and the conclusion resulting from Heidegger’s answer to the question of who calls. As it is Dasein itself which experiences the *Ruf* from out of itself, Heidegger’s conception of revelation is such that revelation arises from Dasein itself, not from a divine origin. However, Dasein still ‘answers’ a ‘call.’ For Strauss, this means that Heidegger preserves or repeats an important aspect of a fundamentally Christian conception of human existence. This leads Strauss to claim that

the first and still possible philosophy after the decomposition of Christianity preserves the truth of Christianity; it is thereby even deeper and more radical than ancient philosophy. Perhaps this consequence is right—in any case, it must be proven as such. But this is only possible through direct confrontation of modern with ancient philosophy. (Letter to Krüger, December 27, 1932, GS 3, 420, my translation, emphasis removed)

For Strauss, Heidegger may yet be more radical than ancient thought, but this must be proven through a comparison of modern and ancient thought on their own respective terms, which according to Strauss is yet to be accomplished. Equally as important, however, is that we can see the beginning here of one of Strauss’s main lines of critique, namely that Heidegger’s thought exemplifies a form of ‘secularized Christianity,’ in the sense, to be discussed in greater detail below, that it purports to be atheist and at the same time holds certain Christian concepts of human existence to be fundamental.⁸

⁷ I have striven to translate this and the rest of the letters I address in this section as literally as possible, sometimes thereby sacrificing English readability. However, some of the halting syntax and possible neologisms seem to be present in the German, as they were never intended for publication

⁸ Strauss here shares the interpretation of Karl Löwith: “[b]ut the basis that serves as the background for everything said by Heidegger, and that permits many to take notice and listen attentively, is something unsaid: the *religious motive*, which has surely detached itself from Christian faith, but which precisely on account of

I will return to this in a moment. Continuing, modern thought has not permitted a direct confrontation with ancient thought because modern thought believes itself to have progressed from the positions held by the ancients. Strauss states that Heidegger is a modern in this way, considering him to possess the fundamentally modern idea of progress. For Strauss,

modern philosophy has from its beginning to Heidegger included, understood itself as progress and progressive. Therefore, the unradicality of modern philosophy: it believes itself to be permitted to presuppose the fundamental questions as already answered, and therefore to be able to ‘progress,’ i.e., the neglect of the Socratic question which Nietzsche has denounced, and the neglect of ontology which Heidegger has discovered. (Letter to Krüger, November 17, 1932, GS 3, 406, my translation, emphasis removed)

In recovering ontological questioning, Heidegger, Strauss claims, believes himself to have advanced beyond the philosophical milieu which came before him. In Heidegger’s return to beginnings, there is a progression from what Strauss would claim is the false endpoint of modern philosophy which was previously held to be the case. In fact, though, Heidegger’s thought seems for Strauss

to lead to the point at which Socrates begins. Modern philosophy thus shows itself as a violent ‘destruction of the tradition,’ but not as a ‘progression.’ It has freely understood itself as progressive, and from this arises the utter complexity and obscurity and unradicality from which the term ‘second cave’ [*zweite Höhle*] should be drawn. (Letter to Krüger, December 27, 1932, GS 3, 415, my translation, emphasis removed)

Strauss often mentions what he calls the ‘second cave’ in his writings from the 1930s, an analogy which for him constitutes radical historicism’s effect on the contemporary situation of, and possibility for, philosophy.⁹ Radical historicism, in permitting an atheistic

its dogmatically unattached indeterminacy appeals all the more to those who are no longer faithful Christians but who nonetheless would like to be religious” (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 133).

⁹ The actual nature of the ‘second cave,’ a concept or analogy which figures prominently in this thesis, is a point of contention amongst interpreters. For Strauss, the ‘second cave’ is an analogy for the “artificial or accidental obstacles to philosophy,” ones which therefore determine “the way in which the introduction to

interpretation of the Bible and thereby preserving the biblical conception of human beings in a historicist way, has changed the natural situation of human beings who desire to philosophize. Through his indication of the contemporary situation of the ‘second cave,’

philosophy must proceed” (PAW, 155). James F. Ward states that “Strauss doubts...that we can grasp the natural world or natural experience as ‘radically prescientific or prephilosophic’ today because our natural world is a product of or profoundly affected by science” (“Experience and Political Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss,” *Polity*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer 1981), 686). Hence, for Ward it seems that the ‘second cave’ is a construct of modern science. However, science does not have the character of a ‘destruction’ of its tradition, from which Strauss’s letter to Krüger indicates the ‘second cave’ results, as it constantly refers to the current state of research in order to determine where it will ‘progress’ from the present moment. However, Ward is moving in the right direction when he states that “the ‘holy city’ may simply have changed its mind about itself or understood itself in light of the novel doctrines which decisively resemble older doctrines in their authoritative character. Our world is the product of science and its self understanding is historicist, then, in the same way in which the ancient world was constituted by custom or the gods” (“Experience and Political Philosophy,” 687). This passage hints at how the natural cave and the second cave can both be called ‘caves;’ i.e., that they both possess the structure of opinions concerning the whole, rather than truth about the whole. More recently, David Janssens has claimed that the ‘second cave’ was “introduced ‘from the outside’ by the tradition of revelation” (*Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss’s Early Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 103). Hence, for Janssens ascent out of the ‘second cave’ requires a “return to ‘the world of philosophy’ as it was before the entry of revealed religion” (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 103). Janssens cites a remark from 1929 which indicates that Strauss believed the retrieval of this ‘world,’ understood as existing before the ‘irruption’ of religion, was his primary task” (*Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 215-215, n. 91; cf. the passage from GS 2, 375 which Janssens quotes at this point). However, Janssens’s position seems to overlook Strauss’s later remark that “[t]o grasp the natural world as a world that is radically prescientific, or prephilosophic, one has to go back behind the first emergence of science or philosophy,” and that this ‘reconstruction’ of “the essential character of the natural world” is possible on the basis of “the information that classical philosophy supplies about its origins..., especially if that information is supplemented by consideration of the most elementary premises of the Bible” (NRH, 79-80). The respective positions of philosophy and religion, as the ‘awful depths’ described in NRH, 74-76, show, are considered to be of a piece when understood in opposition to the position of radical historicism, exemplified for Strauss by the thought of Heidegger. Janssens’s remark also seems not to take into account Strauss’s statement concerning an interpretive position which believes “that the Bible is in an emphatic sense historical, that the Bible, as it were, discovered history (or the biblical authors):” for Strauss, “I do not believe that this approach is very helpful for understanding the Bible, at least as far as its basic parts are concerned” (FPP, 218). To be sure, Strauss claims that Heidegger’s thought has a religious or revelatory character, and hence the ‘second cave’ shares some qualities with a religious position. Strauss says that it is “a tradition based on revelation [*eine auf Offenbarung beruhende Tradition*],” and not revelation itself, which “has added the *historical* difficulty to the *natural* difficulties of philosophizing” (GS 2, 456, Strauss’s emphasis, quoted in Janssens, *Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 103). Taken with Strauss’s remarks about the religious quality of Heidegger’s thought, it seems clear that the ‘second cave’ is constituted by Heideggerian radical historicism. The most prominent difference between philosophy and revelation on the one hand, and radical historicism on the other, is that radical historicism absolutely disallows the possibility of eternal truth to be discovered. Under Strauss’s rubric, philosophy and revelation, while opposed, both claim truth in the final analysis to have an eternal, as opposed to radically temporal, character. Understood in this way, it is possible to view the first chapter of NRH, which I will examine below, as showing the way or method by which to ascend from the second cave of (radical) historicism. I follow Daniel Tanguay’s interpretation, that the ‘second cave’ represents radical historicism, here; see *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 44-45. Neil Robertson elaborates: “[t]he difficulty emerging from out of the crisis of modernity lies in the character of modernity as a constructed reality, a second cave. It is a reality built out of a desire to humanize nature, or—more accurately—to construct a human world in the place of nature” (“Leo Strauss’s Platonism,” *Animus* 4 (1999), 3). I will discuss Strauss’s conception of nature in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Strauss understands himself to oppose Heidegger's thought, the thought which in a very real sense determined Strauss's subsequent philosophical trajectory.¹⁰

Keeping in mind Strauss's early focus in his letters on the atheistic, and yet religious, aspects of Heidegger's thought, it is evident that the introduction to *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935) directly refers to that thought. While Heidegger's name is not mentioned, Strauss's use of Heidegger's vocabulary when discussing radical atheism indicates that it is Heidegger who is intended to be the recipient of Strauss's critique. In this book, Strauss calls the position of "modern 'idealism'" to have been "perfected on the one hand in the discovery of the 'aesthetic' as the purest insight into the creativity of man and, on the other hand, in the discovery of the radical 'historicity' [*Geschichtlichkeit*] of man and his world as the definitive overcoming of the idea of an eternal nature, and eternal truth" (PL, 33; GS 2, 21). The understanding of human existence as radically, or *fundamentally*, historical permits the "rehabilitation of the 'natural world-view' [*natürlichen Weltansicht*] on which the Bible depends" (PL, 33; GS 2, 22). This is because radical historicism makes doubtful the modern scientific description of the world as true. If modern science is simply "one historically contingent form of 'world-construction' among others" (PL 33; GS 2, 21-22), the claim that the Biblical description of the world is correct becomes possible once again.

¹⁰ See "An Unspoken Prologue," in JPCM, 450. One can find further evidence in a prospectus of a book Strauss never published entitled *Die politische Wissenschaft des Hobbes: Eine Einführung in das Naturrecht* (published in GS 3, 193-200). Although only an outline, Strauss mentions Heidegger several times near the end of the prospectus, especially at the end of the last chapter entitled "Der erste Atheismus und die Säkularisierung des Glaubens." In this chapter, Strauss would have discussed "In what way [his] critique is true also against Heidegger" and how "state and death replace God" in relation to Heidegger's interpretation of conscience (GS 3, 199, my translation). We can only guess as to why these critical remarks were never expanded upon. Regardless, it is clear from this prospectus, as well as the other texts discussed in this section, that the young Strauss thought of himself as developing a position intended to criticize the reigning thinker of his era, Heidegger.

However, radical historicism does not permit this description of the world to obtain. Rather, due to its “intellectual probity [*intellektuelle Redlichkeit*],” radical historicism “bids us to renounce the very word ‘God’” (PL 37; GS 2, 25-26). And yet, claims Strauss, this radically atheistic position “is a descendant of the tradition grounded in the Bible: it accepts the thesis, the negation of the Enlightenment, on the basis of a way of thinking which became possible only through the Bible” (PL 37; GS 2, 26). At this point, Strauss understands one possible contemporary means by which to reject Enlightenment to be the adopting of a religious position in the premodern sense; at the same time, probity dismisses the possibility that this position can be considered as true. Thus, the ‘new atheism,’ what Strauss considers to be exemplified by Heidegger’s philosophical position, is itself *formally* grounded in a Biblical understanding of human existence while at the same time disallowing the *content* of religious life, the practices and tradition which purport to be in accordance to the world as God created it. Furthermore, Strauss sees the ‘new atheism,’ and hence Heidegger, as constituting “the last word and the ultimate justification of the Enlightenment” (PL; GS 2).¹¹ We here see the start of Strauss’s argument for the comments, to be examined in further detail, that Heidegger’s position constitutes a fundamentally religious understanding of human existence.¹² However, we also see the early development of Strauss’s understanding of the tension between reason and revelation,

¹¹ As David Janssens notes, Strauss reproduces *verbatim* the paragraph from which this passage is taken in his Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, a text which was written almost thirty years later. In this way, “the autobiographical preface reveals in all clarity what remains implicit in *Philosophy and Law*” (Janssens, *Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 94). I discuss the Preface below.

¹² “For Heidegger, one might say, the ancients and Husserl are correct in trying to begin from the natural, the given world, the life-world; but in their descriptions they all fail to reach the primordially given, the *pragmata*, the fundamental objects of human concern. This failure, to put it in non-Heideggerian terms, is the failure to articulate the fundamental attitude of religiosity permeating the perspective of the life-world” (Laurence Berns, “The Prescientific World and Historicism: Some Reflections on Strauss, Heidegger, and Husserl,” in *Leo Strauss’s Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*, ed. Alan Udoff (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), 170). Berns follows Strauss’s interpretation of Heidegger here; as we shall see in chapter 2 of this thesis, this is not necessarily Heidegger’s own self-interpretation.

or the tension between philosophy and faith as sources of human guidance, as well as his critique of Heidegger's purported collapsing of the two opposed sources into one unstable and, for Strauss, ultimately untenable position. At this point in Strauss's intellectual development, he had not yet encountered the Islamic philosophers who would cause him to develop his conception of the theologico-political problem, and the subsequent conception of the basic relation between religion and politics. Hence, his critique of Heidegger remains at the level of discussing the elements of his thought held to be religious. Due in part to the events in Germany of 1933 and Heidegger's participation in those events, however, this will change.

1.3 1935-1961: Opposition

In "A Giving of Accounts," an autobiographical lecture given with Jacob Klein in 1970, Strauss says that "[a]fter [Heidegger's decision to join the National Socialist party], I ceased to take any interest in him for about two decades" (in JPCM, 461). As the discussion of *Philosophie und Gesetz* above indicates, this statement is almost but not quite true. In addition to that text and some brief discussions of Heidegger in letters published in the intervening years, to be examined below, there are, during this period, two significant mentions of Heidegger, in "Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy," a lecture given in 1940, unpublished in Strauss's lifetime and recently appearing as an appendix in Heinrich Meier's *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*,¹³ and in "German Nihilism," a lecture given in 1941, also unpublished in Strauss's lifetime and recently

¹³ "Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115-139.

appearing in the journal *Interpretation*.¹⁴ In the first lecture, Strauss mentions several thinkers who came to prominence following World War I, including Weber, Husserl, and Spengler. Strauss also mentions Heidegger, although without in-depth discussion. In this lecture, Strauss understands Heidegger to provide the philosophical basis for Spengler's claim that human existence is radically historical. As Strauss states, "Spengler seemed to represent the extreme of historicism; but it was soon seen that he had not gone to the end of his way" ("Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy," 119). The "philosophic deficiency of Spengler's teaching" was that

it required as its basis an elaborate philosophy of man, of human existence as being essentially historical; a philosophy showing that man as *the* historical being is the origin of all meaning; and this presupposed an analysis of truth, an analysis showing that truth is essentially relative to human existence. Such a philosophy was elaborated by *Heidegger*. ("Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy," 119, Strauss's emphasis)

Here Strauss makes the connection between Heidegger's thinking and 'the crisis of the West,' indicating, as is also discussed in Strauss's essay, "Existentialism," to be examined below, that Heidegger's thinking is the most profound example of radical historicism and that such a position is the most extreme expression or result of the underlying crisis, rather than a solution to that crisis.

Strauss does not examine Heidegger's thinking in more detail than was just quoted, but he does repeat an elaboration of the upshot of Heidegger's thinking: the possibility of a return to Plato and Aristotle without the accumulated interpretive apparatus of modern philosophy's approach to them. For Strauss, Heidegger shows that Plato and Aristotle,

¹⁴ "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Spring 1999), 353-378.

assumed to be *refuted* by modern philosophy,¹⁵ have in fact not been adequately understood, and hence, via Heidegger, “a return to Plato and Aristotle [is] an open possibility” (“Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” 134).¹⁶ Heidegger’s historicism “refutes all systems of philosophy—by doing this, it does the cause of philosophy the greatest service” (“Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” 132).¹⁷ Finally, Strauss notes that Heidegger’s ‘achievement’ “would not have been possible without Husserl’s phenomenology” (“Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” 137). Heidegger’s relation to Husserl, as Strauss understands it, is discussed in greater detail in Strauss’s later essay, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” to be examined below.

The second text, “German Nihilism,” is itself more polemical, and constitutes, as the editors of the published version note, “one of the rare occasions on which Professor Strauss suspended his customary reticence and directly addressed an important contemporary issue” (Janssens and Tanguay, Introduction to “German Nihilism,” 353). It is important thereby to note the political context of this lecture, in contrast to the more philosophical context of the previous one, as those respective contexts certainly

¹⁵ For Strauss, the notion of refutation is a characteristic of specifically modern philosophy, along with the notion of progress stemming from refutation. Cf. “Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” 124, where Strauss notes these characteristics, while at the same time stating that “the foundation laid by Descartes [it seems at this point in Strauss’s career that he agreed with Heidegger: Descartes, and not Machiavelli, was the founder of modern philosophy – DT] is never fully tested, because the root of the pre-modern position, the philosophy of Aristotle, the alleged refutation of which is the basis of modern philosophy, is never adequately discussed.” For Strauss, Heidegger provides the tools to begin this discussion.

¹⁶ In “An Unspoken Prologue,” Strauss says that “Heidegger is truly important” because “he made it possible for the first time after many centuries—one hesitates to say how many—to see the roots of the tradition as they are and thus perhaps to know, what so many merely believe, that those roots are the only natural and healthy roots” (JPCM, 450). For Strauss, Heidegger’s thought is secondary to his opening the way to a recovery of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy free from the framework of modern scholarship’s understanding of it. Heidegger’s understanding itself, presumably, would be included under the aegis of modern scholarship for Strauss, however.

¹⁷ Strauss agrees with Heidegger that philosophy is not and cannot be a set of doctrines; rather, it is a way of life. This point of agreement will be explored in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

conditioned how Strauss presented Heidegger in each lecture. In the previous lecture, Heidegger was discussed only in the context of philosophy and hence his philosophical importance is stressed; indignant accusations of Heidegger's relation to National Socialism, and the consequent moral repugnancy surely instilled in his American audience, are reserved for the second lecture.

Strauss begins the lecture by noting that the political nihilism at that time facing both non-Nazi-controlled Europe and America had "deeper roots than the preachings of Hitler" ("German Nihilism," 357). The specifically German form of nihilism desires, for Strauss, "the destruction of something specific: of modern civilization" ("German Nihilism," 357, emphasis removed). Strauss here understands the ideal of 'modern' civilization as specifically "of English and French origin" ("German Nihilism," 370); one upshot of the German anti-civilization philosophical position is "a peculiarly German tradition of contempt for commonsense and the aims of human life as they are visualized in commonsense" ("German Philosophy," 371) which implies that English and French philosophy promote common sense. In contradistinction to the English and French modernism so identified, German nihilism upholds a "return to a pre-modern ideal," in the sense that "[o]n its highest level, it was a return to what may be called the pre-literary stage of philosophy, pre-socratic [*sic*] philosophy" ("German Nihilism," 372). Strauss here acknowledges Heidegger's turn to Heraclitus in the 1935 *Einführung in die Metaphysik*; this is evident especially if one considers Strauss's discussion of the German nihilist tendency to praise the military virtues of courage and sacrifice ("German Nihilism," 371), virtues which profoundly inform those lectures (not to mention the *Rektoratsrede*, *Sein und Zeit* and elsewhere).

Strauss mentions Heidegger by name once in the lecture, at the end of a list of names of those teachers sought by the youth of the interwar period “who could explain to them in articulate language the positive, and not merely the destructive, meaning of their aspirations” (“German Nihilism,” 362). Heidegger is included in a group with Oswald Spengler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, and Ernst Jünger, and Strauss claims that this group “knowingly or ignorantly paved the way for Hitler” (“German Nihilism,” 362). This is not to say that Strauss believed Heidegger to be the most important figure of the preparatory period before Hitler’s arrival, however; this attribution is reserved for Nietzsche, or more specifically, “the atheist Nietzsche” (“German Nihilism,” 362). Heidegger is held here to be the radicalization of a general current of German philosophical thought, ultimately culminating in Heidegger’s philosophical elaboration and grounding of Spengler’s historico-political analysis that the earlier lecture “Living Issues in German Postwar Philosophy” discussed.¹⁸

It is also extremely important to note Strauss’s claim that German nihilism arose from a specifically moral criticism, namely that modern civilization obscured the highest understanding of human existence: the one which holds life to be “based on constant awareness of the sacrifices to which it owes its existence” (“German Nihilism,” 358, emphasis removed). Simultaneously taking “Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy” into account, at this moment Strauss acknowledges the moral and the philosophical importance of Heidegger’s thought, namely returning the level of seriousness demanded of both philosophical and political existence in distinction to the level offered by that political

¹⁸ From Strauss’s perspective, evidence of this could be found in Heidegger’s discussion of authentic life in opposition to that of civil (one is tempted to say bourgeois) *das Man* and his emphasis on death as that which ultimately gives life its moral seriousness found in *Sein und Zeit*, and his subsequent connecting of the categories of *Sein und Zeit* to a National Socialist political framework or moment in the *Rektoratsrede*. I will discuss these texts further in chapter 2 of this thesis.

situation exemplified above all by the Weimar Republic. Even in light of Strauss's reluctance to speak directly of Heidegger's virtues in this lecture, Strauss's ambivalence toward Heidegger is hinted at here.

Between the time of these lectures and those which eventually became *Natural Right and History*, Strauss mentions Heidegger in several letters to Karl Löwith, Alexandre Kojève, and Eric Voegelin. These letters do not present a thorough or detailed examination of Heidegger, but many of the comments Strauss makes can be seen as nascent criticisms developed further in later works, as well as repetitions of earlier criticisms. In the letter to Löwith dated August 15, 1946, Strauss understands Heidegger's thought to be "a refined interpretation of modern historicism, [one that] 'anchors' it 'ontologically'" ("Correspondence Concerning Modernity," 107;¹⁹ GS 3, 662). Consequently, "'historicity' makes nature disappear completely" ("Correspondence Concerning Modernity," 107; GS 3, 662).²⁰ Repeating criticisms made in *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Strauss also writes in a letter to Voegelin from December 10, 1950 that "[h]istoricizing means the forgetting of eternity" (FPP, 75).²¹ Nature, for Strauss, is something permanent, understood in contradistinction to the constantly fluctuating vicissitudes of historical change.²² Heidegger is for Strauss the exemplary radical historicist, and thus the exemplary of the position which presents the

¹⁹ Strauss with Karl Löwith, "Correspondence Concerning Modernity," *The Independent Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (1983), 105-119.

²⁰ It is important to note the second half of this consequence, that it "has the merit of consistency and compels one to reflect" ("Correspondence Concerning Modernity," 107; GS 3, 662). Strauss thus alludes to Heidegger as the impetus for his reflections concerning the possibility of philosophy as Strauss understands it; Strauss is more explicit about this in "An Unspoken Prologue" and "A Giving of Accounts," both found in JPCM.

²¹ Löwith agrees with Strauss's interpretation: "The finitude of temporality and together with it historicity cannot be affirmed more resolutely at the expense of eternity than it is by the author of *Being and Time*" (Nature, History, and Existentialism *and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 75).

²² "The Straussian argument seems to boil down to this: if everything changes its nature, then there is no nature, and so no genuine knowledge, but only transient beliefs" (Stanley Rosen, "Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124). At this point in his career, Strauss seemingly did not wish to emphasize, or did not recognize, the specifically political problem which arises from Heidegger's position.

greatest obstacle to philosophy as Strauss understands it.²³ Heidegger's position "has the merit of consistency and compels one to reflect"²⁴ ("Correspondence Concerning Modernity," 107; GS 3, 662). In addition, in a letter to Voegelin from June 4, 1951, Strauss repeats his earlier criticism of Heidegger that Heidegger's conception of human existence is fundamentally religious in character; however, this 'atheistic interpretation of revelation' "leads to confusion," as Heidegger's conception of the 'call of conscience' "ends in the 'calling' being grasped as Dasein calling itself—here guilt, conscience, action, lose their

²³ Emphasizing Strauss's specifically moral indignation, George Anastaplo reminisces that Strauss "could instruct certain of his students visiting Germany after the war not to have anything to do socially with Heidegger. (I know also that he refused to have anything further to do personally with a noted scholar, a Jewish friend of his from their youth in Germany, who had made his peace with Heidegger.) Even so, he always acknowledged the remarkable talents of Heidegger, considering him 'incomparable in our time,' especially in the comprehensiveness of his thought" (*The Artist as Thinker: From Shakespeare to Joyce* (Athens, OH: Swallows Press, 1983), 475 n. 284). In a letter to Löwith dated February 23, 1950, Strauss is candid about his opinion of Heidegger's character. Strauss holds Löwith to believe that "Heidegger is the greatest spirit now living" (GS 3, 674, my translation). However, as Strauss is quick to add, "I do not want to name him a philosopher—he himself does not want to be a philosopher—I do not know whether a true philosopher must be a man of good will—but I know that a bad will destroys philosophizing and Heidegger is a bad fellow: the contrast between Nietzsche's 'noblesse' and Heidegger's ingenious grumpiness is arresting" (GS 3, 674, my translation). It is apparent from this passage that Strauss makes a specifically *moral* judgement concerning Heidegger, while at the same time acknowledging the greatness of his thought; this is critical to keep in mind. However, Heidegger's 'greatness' is due to the fact that for Strauss, Heidegger presents the clearest and deepest challenge to Strauss's own position. Strauss also expresses this moral critique in a letter to Kojève from September 4, 1949, accusing Heidegger of "cowardly vagueness" (OT, 244) concerning his position vis-à-vis modernity. We can read this judgement in tandem with the passage from the end of Strauss's "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*" which, while not naming Heidegger, clearly intends to critique him as one who "lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny...[and] were forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely because they did nothing but talk of Being" (OT, 212). Based on these two passages, it is fair to conclude that Strauss considered Heidegger to be morally despicable from the perspective of philosophy, due to Heidegger's unwillingness to confront Tyranny directly as Strauss and Kojève believed themselves to have done. Much has been said by various interpreters about 'Heidegger's silence;' for Strauss, as for them, this silence speaks volumes. Also, Strauss is careful to distinguish Heidegger's thought from 'philosophy' as Strauss understands it; see especially remarks made in Strauss's "Existentialism" lecture, 304 (Heidegger's thought is never in fact identified with 'philosophy' here). See also "An Unspoken Prologue": "Superficially or sociologically speaking, Heidegger was the first great German philosopher..." (JPCM, 450). It is also possible to see something of this distinction in the difference Strauss notes between 'intellectual probity' and 'the love of truth,' discussed in the Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, to be discussed below.

²⁴ This important point, that Heidegger's challenge to philosophy in the Socratic sense forces one to reconsider the premises of philosophy in the Socratic sense, cannot be overestimated in its significance for Strauss. Cf. NRH, 31, where Strauss claims that "[r]adical historicism *compels us* [my emphasis] to realize the bearing of the fact that the very idea of natural right presupposes the possibility of philosophy in the full and original meaning of the term. It *compels us* [my emphasis] at the same time to realize the need for unbiased reconsideration of the most elementary premises whose validity is presupposed by philosophy." I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter.

meaning” (FPP, 88). In the 1930s, Strauss was not yet certain that Heidegger’s atheistic interpretation of the *Ruf* was unstable; at this point, due to his prior development of his conception of the tension between reason and revelation, Strauss now holds the judgement that Heidegger’s position is untenable. This is because the resulting experiences which a human undergoes, starting with guilt, lead not to God’s veneration but merely back to the individual human who, according to Heidegger, made the call in the first place. As a result, the call to action based on belief loses significance: each individual Dasein calls itself to action, and there is no way to adjudicate between differing calls as to their goodness or rightness. Heidegger’s position leads to the problem of how to ground or justify ethical positions, at least from a religious basis. Strauss will elaborate this claim in subsequent writings to be discussed below.

As I have shown, many of Strauss’s earlier writings were intended, at least in part, to be contributions to the fight against what he saw as the all-pervasive influence of radical historicism. Strauss contends that this influence has left us in the ‘second cave beneath the cave,’ and as such radical historicism must be overcome in order to arrive at the first position that allows for philosophy as Strauss understands it to begin again. In 1949, almost two decades after Heidegger’s decision for National Socialism, Strauss gave the series of Walgreen lectures which were to become the basis of his book *Natural Right and History*. For the purposes of this thesis, I hold that the first chapter of *Natural Right and History*, published in 1953, is Strauss’s most direct and thorough attempt to oppose, and to initiate the overcoming of, what he understands to be Heideggerian radical historicism.²⁵ However,

²⁵ Tanguay claims that “*Natural Right and History* is Strauss’s response to Heidegger (compare its title with that of Heidegger’s most famous work)” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 229 n. 58). I will begin my analysis of *Natural Right and History* by following through on this comparison. Richard Velkley (“On the

if we begin with this consideration, we immediately encounter an interpretive problem: Heidegger is not named in the chapter under scrutiny here, nor in the rest of the book. We cannot hazard a guess as to why this is,²⁶ but at least we can begin our analysis by a comparison of titles. *Sein und Zeit* and *Natural Right and History*, as titles, share a form: a ‘metaphysical’ or ‘essential’ concept linked with a temporal, and hence transitory, concept. We can read the ‘and’ in each title differently, hopefully in the way each author intended. For Heidegger, Being (*das Sein*) is fundamentally linked to Time (*die Zeit*); in fact, one can argue that for Heidegger, any understanding of *Sein* is itself a function of, or dependent upon, the temporal situation in which that understanding takes place. Thus, for Heidegger, the title instructs the reader to understand both ‘being’ and ‘time’ as one codependent matrix or structure.²⁷ For Strauss, conversely, the concept of natural right is, *qua* natural, something understood to be permanent. Natural right is itself dependent upon the nature of the beings to which the right is appended, or, to be more specific, natural right reflects or

Roots of Rationalism: *Natural Right and History* as Response to Heidegger,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 70 (2008), 247), Richard Kennington (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” in *Leo Strauss’s Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*, 232), Eugene F. Miller (“Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy,” 96), Steven B. Smith (*Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 128), and Timothy Fuller (from a roundtable discussion published in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Émigrés and American Political Thought after World War II*, eds. Peter Graf Kielmansegg, Horst Mewes, and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 165) all hold the same position as Tanguay. Stewart Umphrey notes the parallels in structure and method between *Natural Right and History* and *Sein und Zeit*, and also recognizes that *Natural Right and History* is a “propadeutic” to philosophy in Strauss’s Socratic sense: “Strauss’s intention in *Natural Right and History* is...to indicate the way to the beginning or surface” (“Natural Right and Philosophy,” in *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, 287).

²⁶ Concerning this point, Richard Velkley surmises that “[w]hen Strauss wrote his book, Heidegger was barely known as a thinker in this country [i.e., the USA], but was already notorious for his endorsement of Nazism while rector of the University of Freiburg and on occasions thereafter. The argument of *Natural Right and History*, in its foreground but not only there, is oriented toward the contemporary social sciences and a public-spirited discussion of the foundations of morality and law...Strauss had more than one ground for thinking that he could not afford to give Heidegger a comfortable and well-lit abode in this setting” (“On The Roots of Rationalism: Strauss’s *Natural Right and History* as Response to Heidegger,” 247). For Velkley, Strauss makes a ‘public-spirited’ decision, in the particular context of the very public Walgreen lectures, not to contribute to the dissemination of Heidegger’s thinking. However, Strauss discusses Heidegger very publically in the lecture held in 1956 entitled “Existentialism,” to be discussed below. Attention must be paid to time and place in these two cases.

²⁷ This is the point made in the final sentence of *Sein und Zeit*: “Does *time* manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*?” (BT 488; SZ, 437).

must reflect the permanent political nature of human beings. History, by contrast, is, for Strauss, constantly in motion or impermanent; the historical aspect of human beings shows us to be at least partly within or affected by the temporal flux and subject to the changes such a flux causes. The ‘and’ in the title of Strauss’s book thus points to a fundamental schism or division between the permanent and temporal aspects of human beings, while at the same time acknowledging the relation between those two aspects.²⁸

Strauss wishes to defend the divide, traditionally understood, between the temporal and the permanent. While Strauss acknowledges that the temporal aspect of human existence is constantly in flux, indicated by the fact that human beings always exist at a particular moment in history, the title of Strauss’s book also reflects his claim, to be discussed below, that the temporal aspect does not immediately curtail the possibility of discovering a permanent answer to a permanent question concerning the nature of human beings. The question of the nature of human beings must be possible to answer, or at least must be held to be possible to answer, for philosophy as Strauss understands it to continue.²⁹ Heidegger, conversely, would claim that the temporal aspect is the most fundamental aspect of human existence, for it is *Zeit* which conditions all meanings of *Sein* and the meaning of *Sein* is the fundamental question for Dasein, the being (*Seiende*) which human beings instantiate. For Heidegger, it is not possible to discover an answer to a permanent question, and even to search for one implies an error in method.

We will return to this philosophical crossroads below. For now, the comparison of the titles of, arguably, Heidegger’s and Strauss’s most important books has prepared us to

²⁸ “Philosophy is possible only if there is an absolute horizon or a natural horizon in contradistinction to the historically changing horizons or the caves” (NRH, 35).

²⁹ Interestingly, Strauss makes a distinction between philosophy and the concept of natural right: “[t]he possibility of philosophy does not require more than that the fundamental problems always be the same; but there cannot be natural right if the fundamental problem of political philosophy cannot be solved in a final manner” (NRH, 35).

begin to examine *Natural Right and History*, Chapter 1, as a direct response to Heidegger's thinking. Strauss begins by characterizing the argument against natural right "in the name of history" as "an attack" (NRH, 9). This attack is characterized by the claim that "history shows us that all principles of justice are mutable" (NRH, 9). When we examine the history of the concept of justice, we see that this history is a series of incommensurable claims, each abandoned or overthrown to be replaced by another. There is seemingly no permanent answer to the question 'what is justice?' forthcoming from the history of attempts to answer that question. Strauss claims, however, that merely noticing this does not mean that a permanent answer to the question 'what is justice?' does not exist. On the contrary, "realization of the variety of notions of right is *the* incentive for the quest for natural right" (NRH, 10, Strauss's emphasis). Hence, Strauss notes that the attack on natural right, if it is to have significance, must be a *philosophical* attack.

Strauss next distinguishes between what he calls conventionalism and historicism as two positions which serve as the basis for the rejection of the possibility of natural right. Conventionalism holds that the highest distinction in regards to right is that between convention and nature. For the conventionalist, all concepts of right are merely reflections of the organizing principle of a particular, and hence conventional, political grouping, and thus all concepts of right "have no basis in nature,...are ultimately against nature,...[and] have their ground in arbitrary decisions, explicit or implicit, of communities" (NRH, 11). Historicism, on the contrary, either "conceive[s] of man and his works, his varying notions of justice included, as equally natural as all other things, or else [it] assert[s] a basic dualism between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom or history" (NRH, 11). Hence, the historicist of the second type does not think of concepts of right as arbitrary, but rather as rooted in the human capacity of freedom, and hence "the world of man, of human

creativity, is exalted far above nature” (NRH, 11). For this type of historicist, a concept of right cannot have a basis in the nature of human beings, because human beings are essentially free and hence have characters fundamentally different from natural entities, in the sense that they are not subject to natural laws. Human freedom, as free, is non-teleological and unbounded.³⁰

Strauss claims that conventionalism is in fact the position of classical (i.e., Socratic) political philosophy, which, according to Strauss’s archetype of Plato, believed the world of convention to be likened to a cave. Strauss understands the cave analogy from *The Republic* to be an analogy of specifically political life. As the denizens of the cave only see what has been presented to them by the public artists, their conception of right is itself also a presentation, or an opinion. For Strauss,

[m]en cannot live, that is, they cannot live together, if opinions are not stabilized by social fiat. Opinion thus becomes authoritative opinion or public dogma or *Weltanschauung*. Philosophizing means, then, to ascend from public dogma to essentially private knowledge. The public dogma is originally an inadequate attempt to answer the question of the all-comprehensive truth of the eternal order. Any inadequate view of the eternal order is, from the point of view of the eternal order, accidental or arbitrary; it owes its validity not to its intrinsic truth but to social fiat or convention. The fundamental premise of conventionalism is, then, nothing other than the idea of philosophy as the attempt to grasp the eternal. (NRH, 12)

Here, Strauss alludes to the remarkable claim that from the perspective of a Socratic political philosopher, the principles of the political regime in which one finds oneself

³⁰ Discussing similarities between Heidegger and Schelling, Robert B. Pippin says that for Heidegger, “[o]ur own determination for good or evil...is a kind of phenomenon or appearance, itself possible because of or by reference to ‘the self-positing of the Absolute’ [which, in the case of Heidegger, is ultimately understood in terms of *Ereignis*—DT]. Since this origin is not...a possible object of any account, it follows...that the reality of freedom, or ontological possibility, is absolutely *unlimited*. That is, there can be no system, no ‘whole,’ no ‘philosophy of freedom’” (*Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 408).

always possess the nature of opinions, never that of the ‘eternal’ truth.³¹ A philosophical position which adheres to this claim is, for Strauss, the starting point for philosophy, which he characterizes as the attempt to ascend from the world of opinion to the world of truth, to move out of the cave and into the light of the sun.

On the contrary, the historicist, says Strauss, believes this to be impossible. For the historicist,

all human thought is historical and hence unable ever to grasp anything eternal. Whereas, according to the ancients, philosophizing means to leave the cave, according to our contemporaries all philosophizing essentially belongs to a ‘historical world,’ ‘culture,’ ‘civilization,’ ‘*Weltanschauung*,’ that is, to what Plato called the cave. (NRH, 12)

If the philosopher cannot leave the cave, he is consigned to examining only the interior of the cave, i.e., the opinions upon which the regime is based. Further, if historicism is correct, the philosopher cannot even recognize the opinions as opinions because the cave is a ‘sealed,’ complete world of opinions with no ‘eternal’ truth being possible to discover. As was noted above, Strauss calls this situation the second, ‘unnatural’ cave, and it is only through monumental effort that we can ascend from this second cave into the first, i.e., that we can overcome the historical approach and return to the natural first position of human beings—the world of opinion. Surprisingly, however, Strauss suggests elsewhere that “only the history of philosophy makes possible the ascent from the second, ‘unnatural’ cave” (PL, 136 n. 2). Only the turn to the past ways of approaching the problems can serve to liberate the contemporary philosopher from historicist thinking, for “as long as that pseudo-philosophy [i.e., radical historicism] rules, elaborate historical studies may be needed which would have been superfluous and therefore harmful in more fortunate times” (PAW, 155).

³¹ The problematic character of this claim, namely that politics is always based upon an opinion, never on the truth, leads us to the problem of how to conceal philosophy’s discovery of and argument for this fact from political persecution. I will return to this question in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Study of the history of philosophy, then, is Strauss's suggestion to allow for the recommencement of philosophy.³²

Returning to the discussion of historicism, we can see that Strauss is in fact engaged in a genealogical examination of the 'historical school.'³³ Strauss wishes to pinpoint exactly when in the history of philosophy the historical school emerged in opposition to the 'unhistorical' approach previous to it, and identifies this moment as immediately following, and in reaction to, the French Revolution.³⁴ Strauss makes the claim that the historical school identified a problem with universal principles in general, for "[t]he recognition of universal principles...tends to prevent men from wholeheartedly identifying themselves with, or accepting, the social order that fate has allotted to them" (NRH, 14). In comparing their current situation to the idealistic/utopic 'best case scenario' of political life, human beings judge and condemn their real political situation. The belief in universal principles "tends to alienate [human beings] from their place on the earth. It tends to make them strangers, and even strangers on the earth" (NRH, 14). Hence, the historical school turned

³² Of course, this study must be carried out in accordance with Strauss's particular understanding of how to interpret a philosophical text, which I will examine in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

³³ Strauss does not name which thinkers he believes to constitute the most important of the 'historical school' in the first chapter of NRH, he does give some clues as to who they were: "[t]he historical school emerged in reaction to the French Revolution and to the natural right doctrines that had prepared that cataclysm" (NRH, 13); the historical school believed "that the natural is always individual and that therefore the uniform is unnatural or conventional," and, as a consequence, "the historical school asserted that the local and the temporal have a higher value than the universal" (NRH, 14-15). However, if we turn to the end of NRH, we realize that for Strauss, the thought of Edmund Burke specifically constitutes one of the forerunners of the 'historical school:' "Burke's political theory is, or tends to become, identical with a theory of the British constitution, i.e., an attempt to discover 'the latent wisdom which prevails' in the actual" (NRH, 319). Strauss sees Burke as "the preparation for Hegel" (NRH, 319), the ideas of whom the just-quoted sentence intimates, and who can be seen as the philosopher of history *par excellence*. More generally, it is important to note that the argument of NRH moves in a circle: the end demands return to the beginning.

³⁴ Cf. Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity," 94, which indicates that Nietzsche's thinking is a radicalization of that of Rousseau, occurring as it does after the discovery of 'the historical sense.' Nietzsche represents the beginning of radical historicism for Strauss, and hence a very different philosophical position from that of Rousseau (whose thinking, it may be argued, served as one of the inspirations for the French Revolution); however, as indicated by the title of the essay, Strauss understands these disparate thinkers as particular instances of a larger philosophical movement.

the focus from universal principles to the principles of local and temporal character.³⁵ In fact, claims Strauss, one can say that “the historical school asserted the local and the temporal have a higher value than the universal” (NRH, 15). As a source for ways of living, then, the local and the temporal take precedence over any claims to universality. Strauss says that

[b]y denying the significance, if not the actual existence, of universal norms, the historical school destroyed the only solid basis of all efforts to transcend the actual. Historicism can therefore be described as a much more extreme form of modern this-worldliness than the French radicalism of the eighteenth century had been. It certainly acted as if it intended to make men absolutely at home in ‘this world.’ (NRH, 15)

At this point we can see the outlines of Strauss’s understanding of Heidegger’s ‘radical historicist’ position. Strauss sees modernity as a continuous radicalization of its innermost tendencies, culminating in Heidegger’s thinking which claims that human beings dwell absolutely in ‘this world.’³⁶ For Heidegger, transcendence of one’s historical situation, in the sense of acquiring knowledge of a permanent and stable ‘nature,’ is impossible.

Next, Strauss claims that “[i]n trying to discover standards which, while being objective, were relative to particular historical situations, the historical school assigned to historical studies a much greater importance than they had ever possessed” (NRH, 16). As was mentioned above, the turn to studying history in order to discover, not attempts to grasp the eternal, but attempts to unearth objectivity from within local and temporal situations, became more and more prominent. Historicism thus became more positivistic, for “history was thought to supply the only empirical, and hence only solid, knowledge of what is truly human” (NRH, 17). However, this in turn had the consequence of eliminating

³⁵ This is, claims Strauss, fundamentally for a political purpose. Cf. CM, 3, to be discussed below.

³⁶ Cf. Strauss’s claims concerning Heideggerian *Unheimlichkeit* in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” discussed below.

the possibility of deriving objective principles from historical study, for “the historical school had obscured the fact that the particular or historical standards can become authoritative only on the basis of a universal principle which imposes an obligation on the individual to accept, or to bow to, the standards suggested by the tradition or situation which has molded him” (NRH, 17). As the historical approach rejects any principle which could be considered universal, “the only standards that remained were of a purely subjective character, standards that had no other support than the free choice of the individual” (NRH, 18). For Strauss, “[h]istoricism culminated in nihilism. The attempt to make man absolutely at home in this world ended in man’s becoming absolutely homeless” (NRH, 18).³⁷ Strauss does not exactly accuse Heidegger of nihilism here, but he certainly wishes to indicate the nihilistic consequences of Heidegger’s position.³⁸

For Strauss, it seems that, when radicalized, historicism claims that the progress of history is ultimately meaningless, in the sense that history does not have an internal rationality and cannot provide any universal principles for action; any principles therewith derived are arbitrarily chosen and subject to embrace or disregard by the free individual. Interestingly, Strauss notes, this approach to history “was fundamentally the classical view” (NRH, 18), or, the ‘conventionalist’ view discussed above.³⁹ For such a view, the

³⁷ It is interesting to compare Strauss’s position toward Kojève on this point, as he accuses Kojève of holding nearly the same idea (“[o]n the basis of Kojève’s presuppositions, unqualified attachment to human concerns becomes the source of philosophic understanding: man must be absolutely at home on the earth, he must absolutely be a citizen of the earth, if not a citizen of part of the inhabitable earth” (OT, 212). However, Strauss places himself and Kojève in a different category than Heidegger, who, according to Strauss, “lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny” (OT, 212). This last statement is a result of the fact that, according to Strauss, Heidegger did not address or focus on political life in the correct way, as Strauss and Kojève seem to do.

³⁸ The question of nihilism is important for both Strauss and Heidegger, as each thinker is in an important sense responding to Nietzsche’s *Zeitdiagnose*. I address this issue in the conclusion of this thesis.

³⁹ For the ‘classical’ position, the guiding principle of political moderation demands adherence to, or at least respect for, the reigning political opinions. One can see evidence of this position in Strauss’s statement that “[w]e are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy” (LAM, 24). However, it is important to note also that Strauss believes that “even by proving that

conventional existed in contrast to the universally and temporally transcendent, and history was considered to be fundamentally arbitrary when contrasted with the eternal, the proper object of philosophical speculation. However, “the mood created by historicism...was interpreted as the unheard-of experience of the true situation of man as man—of a situation which earlier man had concealed from himself by believing in universal and unchanging principles” (NRH, 18). Instead of turning to contemplation of the eternal, the proper approach for philosophy according to Strauss,⁴⁰ historicism claims that “the foundations of human thought are laid by unpredictable experiences or decisions” (NRH, 19). To claim that philosophy can discover permanent answers to its questions is, for the historicist, misguided and quixotic at best, or an attempt at domination at worst.

According to Strauss, the development of radical historicism out of earlier historicism was a two-step process, which, based on Strauss’s language, may be said to begin in the thought of Kant.⁴¹ First, philosophy becomes “a ‘critique of reason’ that allegedly proves the impossibility of theoretical metaphysics and of philosophical ethics or natural right;” second, historicism claims to prove “that the positive sciences,” formerly considered as free from metaphysical and ethical import, “rest on metaphysical

a certain view is indispensable for living well, one proves merely that the view in question is a salutary myth: one does not prove it to be true. Utility and truth are two entirely different things” (NRH, 6). I will discuss the problematic relation between philosophy and politics as Strauss sees it in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁰ “Every philosopher *belongs* essentially to this or that *ethnos* [i.e., people, nation, or tribe] but as [a] philosopher he must transcend it” (Strauss, “The Problem of Socrates,” 327).

⁴¹ Strauss’s student Stanley Rosen claims this, and even goes so far as to claim that Kant is more radical than Heidegger in regards to originating the radical historicist position. See Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 24, where he calls postmodernism, based in the thought of Heidegger, “essentially Kantian.” Rosen also claims Strauss “to come closer to Kant in the roots of his thought” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 125). This is because for Rosen, Kant’s doctrine is that “nature understood as Greek *physis* is not accessible to us and hence there is no independent standard for scientific ‘theories’” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 126), and Strauss, Rosen argues, holds this position. In fact, for Rosen, “it seems entirely proper to contend that Strauss, like Plato, was in fact a Kantian” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 126). I believe the crucial difference to lie in the fact that Strauss, like Plato and unlike Kant, believed in one of the central tenets of esoteric writing, that the truth about the lack of knowledge of the whole has potentially damaging political consequences. I will discuss this issue further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

foundations” (NRH, 19-20). This second step is taken by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, and here we see Strauss considering Heidegger to be a radicalization of Kant’s project of a global critique of pure reason: “[h]istoricism stems...from that modern tradition which tried to define the limits of human knowledge” (NRH, 20).

Strauss next claims that the very ‘experience of history,’ the recognition of humanity’s temporal situatedness, “seems rather to prove that all human thought, and certainly all philosophic thought, is concerned with the same fundamental themes or the same fundamental problems, and therefore that there exists an unchanging framework which persists in all changes of human knowledge of both facts and principles” (NRH, 23-24). This bold claim, left unargued for at this point in the chapter, is tenuous at best, but for now we will continue.⁴² Even if this eternal framework is real, claims Strauss, the cause of natural right can still be lost. This is because “[t]here cannot be natural right if human thought is not capable of acquiring genuine, universally valid, final knowledge within a limited sphere or genuine knowledge of specific subjects” (NRH, 24).⁴³ Ironically, Strauss notes that historicism itself, if it is to be consistent, must claim to have discovered such knowledge: “historicism admits that human thought is capable of acquiring a most

⁴² Strauss argues that it is the fundamental problems which persist as the ‘unchanging framework,’ and the experience of history indicates the existence of these problems. Strauss also calls these problems ‘ideas,’ understood in the Platonic sense (e.g., consider Strauss’s title for chapter 3 of NRH, “Origin of the Idea of Natural Right,” which is a genealogy of the origin of the *problem* of natural right in Socratic thought; on this issue, see Kennington, “Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 236-237). Victor Gourevitch says that Strauss “thinks it less problematic to start with ‘our commonsense or natural understanding of our common-sense or natural world’ and instead of speaking about ‘being’ or about the ‘whole’ which is ‘always’ or ‘intelligible,’ to speak about a ‘framework’ of ‘fundamental riddles’ or ‘fundamental problems and alternatives,’ which is ‘unchanging’ or ‘coeval with human thought’” (“The Problem of Natural Right and the Fundamental Alternatives in *Natural Right and History*, in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, eds. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Soffer (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), 31). Strauss’s change of the starting position of philosophic examination, a return to a Socratic political philosophic conception, marks his difference from Heidegger. I will discuss Strauss’s positions concerning nature and ‘first philosophy’ in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴³ It is extremely important to pay attention to Strauss’s language here. He is not saying that such a truth has been discovered, only that human beings must be *capable* of discovering such a truth,, i.e., that it must be *possible*.

important insight that is universally valid and will in no way be affected by any future surprises” (NRH, 24). Hence, it seems that the historicist position, if it is to be rationally consistent, must admit to the possibility of a return to non-historicist thought in the future.⁴⁴

It is here that Strauss properly begins his examination of Heideggerian thought, identified throughout this section of *Natural Right and History* as ‘radical historicism.’ Strauss says that “the radical historicist refuses to admit the trans-historical character of the historicist thesis” (NRH, 26).⁴⁵ This is because the radical historicist denies the possibility of objectivity, and the trans-historical claim for the historical character of human life is meant to be objective. This denial is based on the presupposition that “all understanding, all knowledge, however limited and ‘scientific,’ presupposes a frame of reference; it presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which all understanding and knowing take place” (NRH, 26). Strauss notes the Nietzschean basis for such a claim, stating that the historicist thesis

⁴⁴ In a supplementary text to *Truth and Method*, one which discusses Strauss in detail, Gadamer responds to this claim by saying that “historicism that takes itself seriously will allow for the fact that one day its thesis will no longer be considered true—i.e., that people will think ‘unhistorically.’ And yet not because asserting that all knowledge is conditioned is meaningless and ‘logically’ contradictory” (*Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, trans. Joel Weisheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2003), 534). Gadamer seems to be saying that a consistent historicism allows for the overcoming of historicism, and this event would itself show the truth of historicism in the sense that our present historicist epoch is replaced by a future non-historicist one which in turn has its own ideas relative to itself. The truth of the historicist hypothesis is preserved in this account. Gadamer, contra Strauss, does not allow for the thought of any particular epoch to be *the* truth, however. It is unclear, were Gadamer to have lived until a non-historicist epoch arrived, whether he would have smiled at the confirmation of his thesis as a result of the ‘delusional’ thinking of those who had abandoned historicism.

⁴⁵ Reiner Schürmann dismisses Strauss as wrongly applying the term ‘historicist’ to Heidegger, and claims that “the rejection of historicism is a constant in Heidegger’s thought” (*Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 353 n.24). It is evident from this passage that Strauss considers Heidegger’s radicality to transcend the boundaries of historicism, while still remaining within its orbit. Differing in their conclusions regarding Heidegger almost to the point of polar opposition, both Strauss and Schürmann nevertheless would agree that Heidegger was not a historicist in the apparent sense of the word.

would make human life itself impossible⁴⁶....To avert the danger, Nietzsche could choose one of two ways: he could insist on the strictly esoteric character of the theoretical analysis of life—that is, restore the Platonic notion of the noble delusion—or else he could deny the possibility of theory proper and so conceive of thought as essentially subservient to, or dependent on, life or fate. If not Nietzsche himself, at any rate his successors adopted the second alternative. (NRH, 26)

Alluded to here as the archetypal ‘successor’ of Nietzsche, Strauss thus claims Heidegger to have followed the second alternative.⁴⁷ Strauss draws the radical historicist’s two claims together: “[t]he comprehensive view of the whole cannot be validated by reasoning, since it is the basis of all reasoning...[and] we have to *choose* such a view without any rational guidance” (NRH, 27, my emphasis). However, this is not a free choice, for our horizon is imposed on us by *fate*. For the radical historicist, and also seemingly for the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, we are thus “free in the sense that we are free either to choose in anguish the world view and the standards imposed on us by fate or else to lose ourselves in illusory security or in despair” (NRH, 27).⁴⁸ We have the choice to live within historical boundaries either authentically or inauthentically; there is no possibility of transcending those boundaries.

⁴⁶ “There is a degree...of historical sense which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people, or a culture” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 10). I will briefly discuss Nietzsche further in the conclusion of this thesis.

⁴⁷ Strauss, meanwhile, seems to have chosen the first option. On this point, Corine Pelluchon states that “Strauss and Heidegger belong to a critical movement of modern rationalism. They are conscious of being placed in the world described by Nietzsche, but Heidegger is the direct inheritor of Nietzsche, while Strauss distances himself from this: he has another diagnosis of the origin and the sense of the crisis of our times and proposes a remedy which has nothing to do with the doctrine of the Eternal Return” (*Leo Strauss, une autre raison, d’autres Lumières: Essai sur la crise de la rationalité contemporaine* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2005), 201, my translation). I will briefly discuss the connection of Strauss and Heidegger to Nietzsche in the conclusion of this thesis.

⁴⁸ It seems obvious that Strauss is speaking of Heidegger’s conception of authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*] here. The possibility of authentic choice exists only through the experience of anxiety concerning the possibility of death, and with acknowledgement of the possibility of death, Dasein is “wrenched away from the ‘they’” (“*dem Man entrissen*”) (SZ, 263). I discuss this further in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Radical historicist thought, or so it claims, must be committed, or engaged, or *entschiedend*, for the experience of history to disclose itself. Hence, the trans-historical insight of the historicist school “does not transcend history if it belongs to a specific historical situation” (NRH, 28). Rather, the historical situation which discloses the historicist insight is the “source” (NRH, 28) of that insight, i.e., the insight depends on a dispensation of fate, or, we may tentatively state with Heidegger, the ‘erring of *Sein*.’⁴⁹ This in turn means that the arrival of the ‘absolute moment’ of history, the moment in which “the essential character of all thought becomes transparent” (NRH, 28) is a necessary precursor to radical historicism. This is the moment “in which the insoluble character of the fundamental riddles has become manifest or in which the fundamental delusion of the human mind has been dispelled” (NRH, 29), i.e., the moment in which the impossibility of answering permanent and universal questions has been shown to be the case, and in which the end of “philosophy, in the full and original sense of the term” (NRH, 30) has come to pass.

Strauss next retraces Heidegger’s analysis of Plato. Heidegger claims Plato to answer the question of ‘what is being?’ through “the dogmatic identification of ‘to be’ in the highest sense with ‘to be always’” (NRH, 30).⁵⁰ Conversely, the historicity of human life reveals such notions as:

what is called the whole is actually always incomplete and therefore not truly a whole; the whole is essentially changing in such a manner that its future

⁴⁹ Cf. Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics,” in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 88.

⁵⁰ Cf. Heidegger’s claim that Plato’s cave metaphor indicates his initiation of metaphysics through a covering-over of the more originary character of truth as $\epsilon\lambda\ \alpha\eta\epsilon\iota\alpha$, in “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” PM, 180-181; GA 9, 234-236. In a reversal of the charges laid against Platonic philosophy, Strauss claims that upon contemplation of Heidegger, “[w]e are forced to suspect that historicism is the guise in which dogmatism likes to appear in our age” (NRH, 22). This is because, for Strauss, radical historicism does not pursue the consequences of the experience of history to their end, and thus historicism is dogmatic in the sense of “the inclination ‘to identify the goal of our thinking with the point at which we become tired of thinking’” (NRH, 22).

cannot be predicted; the whole as it is in itself can never be grasped, or it is not intelligible; human thought essentially depends on something that cannot be anticipated or that can never be an object or that can never be mastered by the subject; 'to be' in the highest sense cannot mean—or at any rate, it does not necessarily mean—'to be always.' (NRH, 31).

If the absolute moment in history reveals these theses as true, then the entire history of philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche has been an error, or determined by an erring of *Sein*.

Strauss does not critique these theses in detail, perhaps because the fundamental focus of *Natural Right and History* is political philosophy, not ontology.⁵¹ Strauss consequently continues:

radical historicism compels us to realize the bearing of the fact that the very idea of natural right presupposes the possibility of philosophy in the full and original sense of the term. It compels us at the same time to realize the need for unbiased reconsideration of the most elementary premises whose validity is presupposed by philosophy. (NRH, 31)

Heidegger's radical historicism, as much as it is deemed problematic by Strauss, is itself the necessary propaedeutic to a reconsideration of the fundamental principles of philosophy as Strauss understands it, and, in turn, the question of natural right which political philosophy seeks to answer. In "An Unspoken Prologue" (1959), a more autobiographical work unintended for publication, Strauss says that "by uprooting and not simply rejecting the tradition of philosophy, [Heidegger] made it possible for the first time after many

⁵¹ Strauss presents five nascent criticisms here, although none of them are developed in detail at this point. 1) Historicism "either ignores or distorts" "the simple experiences regarding right and wrong which are at the bottom of the philosophic contention that there is natural right;" 2) "the most thoroughgoing attempt to establish historicism culminated in the assertion that if and when there are no human beings, there may be *entia*, but there cannot be *esse*, that is, that there can be *entia* while there is no *esse*;" 3) connected to this is "the rejection of the view that 'to be' in the highest sense means 'to be always,'" i.e., the denial of eternity; 4) the "contrast between the way in which historicism understands the thought of the past and the genuine understanding of the thought of the past;" and 5) the problem of the foundational status of the 'experience of history' (NRH, 32) Strauss's elaboration of the fifth criticism will be discussed below. Additionally, Strauss considers the second criticism as evidence of the "darkness, indeed absurdity of *Sein und Zeit*" (Letter to Karl Löwith, December 12th, 1951, GS 3, 677). Strauss expresses his thoughts explicitly in private correspondence, but, as was discussed above, Strauss seems to have had several reasons for not engaging with Heidegger's texts directly in *Natural Right and History*. There is textual evidence in *Sein und Zeit* which merits at least part of Strauss's critique: "...only as long as Dasein is..., 'is there' Being" (BT, 255; SZ, 212).

centuries—one hesitates to say how many—to see the roots of the tradition as they are” (JPCM, 450). Rather than taking the positivist approach to philosophical problems and therefore willfully ignoring the history of answers to those problems, Heideggerian *Destruktion* ‘uprooted’ or ‘loosened’ the tradition in order to clear away the accumulated detritus of centuries of classical scholarship. As a result of Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of the history of philosophy, Strauss was able to see “the possibility which Heidegger had opened without intending it: the possibility of a genuine return to classical philosophy, to the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, a return with open eyes and in full clarity about the infinite difficulties which it entails” (JPCM, 450).⁵²

However, this is not to say that Strauss followed or branched directly from Heidegger’s path, as his other students or disciples Arendt, Gadamer, Jonas, etc., arguably have done.⁵³ Instead, in the context of *Natural Right and History*, Strauss wishes to make some first steps toward a global critique of radical historicism, steps which are elaborated in other works. The experience of history, claims Strauss, is problematic as a foundational experience for human beings, for, “in the transition from early (theoretical) to radical (‘existential’) historicism, the ‘experience of history’ was never submitted to critical

⁵² As elsewhere, Strauss is ambivalent toward Heidegger on this point. Historicism has left us in a ‘second cave,’ which thereby necessitates ‘historical study’ of the tradition of political philosophy; and yet, as James F. Ward notes, historical study also permits us both “to recover the experiential basis of political philosophy and to transform our inherited knowledge into genuine knowledge” (“Political Philosophy and History: The Links Between Strauss and Heidegger,” *Polity*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter 1987), 289). Heidegger’s thought is the exemplary of that which places us in the second cave, but the way in which to free ourselves from this cave itself permits a fresh experience of the tradition of political philosophy free from the sediment of interpretations of that tradition. For Arthur M. Melzer, “Strauss’s acknowledged debt to Heidegger means that it is precisely historicism at its peak that eventually, if unintentionally, produced the radical new openness to and reinvigoration of nonhistoricist thought at its peak. Thus..., Strauss sees his own path of thought as not simply *sui-generis*, but as representing the self-overcoming of historicism” (“Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (May 2006), 283).

⁵³ According to Velkley, for Strauss “Heidegger’s question [i.e., the question of Being] is a necessary one, and Strauss’s inquiries are in a sense a continuation of Heidegger’s...The problems for Strauss arose in the implications Heidegger drew from his question, or the attitudes he adopted toward it” (“On The Roots of Rationalism,” 253). The perplexing status of Strauss’s position vis-à-vis Heideggerian ontology will be discussed further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

analysis” (NRH, 32).⁵⁴ This then leads Strauss to “raise the question whether what is called the ‘discovery’ of history is not, in fact, an artificial and makeshift solution to a problem that could arise only on the basis of very questionable premises,” (NRH, 33), namely, the premises of modern philosophy as opposed to ancient philosophy.⁵⁵ Strauss makes this claim in order to suggest another possibility, that “[h]istoricism is the ultimate outcome of the crisis of *modern* natural right” (NRH, 34, my emphasis).⁵⁶ This possible situation arises in two steps. First, philosophy was reconceived as an endeavour “in the service of the relief of man’s estate,” and “for the sake of human power” (CM, 3), that is, the ancient conception of ‘political philosophy’ was replaced by the modern conception of the same. Second, as a result of the ‘discovery of history,’ this reconception of philosophy’s task was itself conceived as mere ideology. This meant that modern philosophy’s task was seemingly derived from one historically-determined conception of justice, no more or less ‘true’ than any other (CM, 6-7). Left with the incommensurability of these two positions, the crisis of ‘modern natural right’ or ‘modern political philosophy’ began, and with it, due

⁵⁴ “Strauss suggests that appeal to this irreducible experience (much like the appeal to revelation) must confront the problem of the seeming multiplicity of such experiences or revelations...How do we know, then, that the anguished experience of historicity is the basic experience that reveals the fundamental situation of man as man?” (Melzer, “Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism,” 282). As will be discussed forthwith, this multiplicity of experiences in their conflict and mutual contradiction gives rise to the possibility of acknowledgement of the fundamental problems toward which the multiplicity points. Philosophy as Strauss understands it is nothing other than contemplation of these problems.

⁵⁵ Strauss considers the history of philosophy to be defined fundamentally by the rupture between the ancient and modern philosophical approaches. This is in opposition to Heidegger, who traces the history of philosophy as an uninterrupted line from Plato to Nietzsche. Strauss’s and Heidegger’s respective understandings of the history of philosophy, arising from their respective methods of reading that history, will be compared in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵⁶ Stanley Rosen notes a possible objection to Strauss here, that Heidegger’s (as well as Husserl’s) theoretical analysis of human existence is “theoretically superior to the Straussian appropriation of the Socratic starting point in *doxa*” (“Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 123). However, Rosen continues, Strauss’s reply would be that “[i]n both cases, very far from being transparent analyses of ‘ordinary language,’...these thinkers impose a theoretical superstructure onto their preferred linguistic phenomena, which are thereby transformed from the things in themselves to human constructions” and therefore, most importantly, exemplify “the triumph of modern science” (123). This claim would give justification to Strauss’s position that Heidegger’s thought is radically *modern*.

to the fact that “in the modern centuries philosophy has become thoroughly politicized” (NRH, 34), the crisis of philosophy in general.⁵⁷

However, could it not be that the experience of history, instead of leading to radical historicism and the rejection of the possibility of answering permanent and universal problems, in fact shows these problems to *be* permanent and universal? According to Strauss,

[i]n grasping these problems as problems, the human mind liberates itself from its historical limitations. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in the original, Socratic sense: philosophy is knowledge that one does not know; that is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental problems and, therewith, of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are coeval with human thought. (NRH, 32)

This passage shows Strauss’s intent to reject the consequences of Heidegger’s thinking. Strauss still holds a debt to Heidegger, which consists in Heidegger’s *Destruktion* having allowed Strauss to see the tradition of philosophy anew.⁵⁸ Contrary to Heidegger’s intention, however, Strauss’s rejection consists in his adopting a Socratic conception of philosophical activity, one which claims to have the ability to transcend one’s historical situation by leaving the ‘cave’ of political opinion.⁵⁹ The proper recognition of the

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note here that, as Ronald Beiner states, for both Strauss and Heidegger, the crisis has as its root an “intellectual transformation” (“Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss,” 243). Both Strauss and Heidegger situate the origin of the crisis in a particular thinker’s work (for Strauss, Machiavelli; for Heidegger, Plato); however, both thinkers, writing as they were in what one could understate as politically turbulent times, view those times as having their origin in the works of the mind.

⁵⁸ “...the crisis of our time may have the accidental advantage of enabling us to understand in an untraditional, a fresh, manner what was hitherto understood only in a traditional, derivative manner” (Strauss, “The Crisis of Our Time,” in *The Predicament of Modern Politics*, ed. Howard Spaeth (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1964), 53, and “Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time,” in *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science*, eds. George J. Graham and George W. Carey (New York: David McKay Company, 1972), 228). As was noted above, Strauss repeats this sentiment in “An Unspoken Prologue,” in JPCM, 450.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Gourevitch notes that Strauss “does not so much defend the premises which [radical historicism] challenges as he challenges the premises on which it proceeds” (“The Problem of Natural Right and the Fundamental Alternatives in *Natural Right and History*,” 31). This may be connected to the possibility that a full-scale defense of Strauss’s Socratic position would amount to giving too much credence to Heidegger in such a prominent place as the first chapter of *Natural Right and History*. See the quotation from Velkley, n. 26 above.

‘experience of history,’ fundamentally connected to our situation within the ‘second cave,’ necessitates the radical reinterpretation of the tradition of political philosophy, which in turn permits us to arrive at the natural first position for philosophical activity as Strauss understands it, or expressed metaphorically, to climb from the second cave to the first cave in order to begin the ascent out of cave-dwelling entirely.⁶⁰

Contrary to his approach in *Natural Right and History*, Strauss explicitly addresses Heidegger in the next work that I will examine, “Existentialism,” which was delivered as a lecture in February, 1956, and remained unpublished in Strauss’s lifetime.⁶¹ In terms of detail and depth of argument, *Natural Right and History* and “Existentialism” are the two most important examinations of Heidegger’s thought found in Strauss’s body of work, and can be said to form the core of his critique of Heidegger. Strauss begins the essay by noting

⁶⁰ Luc Ferry considers Strauss’s position to be a translation, one “almost literally,” of Heideggerian “phenomenological deconstruction of metaphysical humanism” into the field of political philosophy (Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Philosophie politique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007, originally published as a separate work by Ferry alone in 1985), 19, my translation). Hence, from Ferry’s perspective Strauss and Heidegger present *the* challenges to Ferry’s own position, one which idiosyncratically attempts to buttress the modern philosophical perspective against those challenges through recourse to the thought of Fichte and Kant. Catherine Zuckert answers Ferry’s criticism by stating that “Strauss himself describes the development of his thought from Nietzsche’s critique of modern philosophy back to the ancients by way of a reexamination of the Enlightenment criticism of revelation and medieval Arabic and Jewish commentators on Plato and Aristotle” (“A Heideggerian Strauss?,” in *The Review of Politics*, 53, 4 (Autumn 1991), 724). As I have shown, however, Heidegger is absolutely critical for Strauss’s intellectual development, but as an intellectual combatant rather than as a model to be emulated. Ferry is incorrect to collapse the two thinkers together, but he is right to recognize that much of Strauss’s approach to political things has a Heideggerian basis. As Gregory Bruce Smith holds, “there are ideas that Strauss takes from late modern authors like Nietzsche and Heidegger, but he always uses them for different ends” (“The Post-Modern Leo Strauss?,” *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 19, No. 1-3 (1994), 192).

⁶¹ Some remarks about the context of the lecture are in order. First, “Existentialism” was presented in February 1956 at the Hillel Foundation; its audience is specifically intended to be Jewish (see the first sentence of the lecture: “[t]his series of lectures—a reminder of the perplexities of modern man—should help the Jewish students in particular towards facing the perplexities of the modern Jew with somewhat greater clarity” (“Existentialism,” 303)). Strauss therefore intended his first public discussion of Heidegger’s thought, so identified, to be encountered by a *religious* audience, an audience of *believers*, and his constant emphasis throughout the lecture of the religious character of Heidegger’s thought must be understood in light of this fact. Second, this lecture, in addition to “The Problem of Socrates,” given in 1970, was published as “Two Lectures by Leo Strauss” (ed. David Bolotin, Christopher Bruell, and Thomas L. Pangle, *Interpretation*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Spring 1995), 301-338). These lectures were also published “in a more heavily edited form intended to make them more accessible to a wider audience” (“Two Lectures,” 301) as “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” the third chapter of RCPR. This edited version unfortunately obscures the different contexts, both physical and temporal, of the two lectures, and also obscures the critical fact that Strauss did not publish any detailed critique of Heidegger *that named him* in his (Strauss’s) lifetime.

the importance of existentialism, by which Strauss means the thought of Heidegger: “[e]xistentialism has reminded many people that thinking is incomplete and defective if the thinking being, the thinking individual, forgets himself as *what* he is. It is the old Socratic warning” (“Existentialism,” 303, my emphasis).⁶² Intimating the importance of Heidegger for a recovery of Greek thought that I discussed earlier in this section, Strauss is here showing the superiority of Heideggerian thinking to the rest of modern philosophy.⁶³ As Strauss states, Heidegger reminds us that “the thinking man is not a pure mind, a point-reading observer, for instance” (“Existentialism,” 303). Strauss and Heidegger thus seem to agree that human beings are fundamentally conditioned by that which is external to them. Strauss’s point here concerning what could be called the ‘lifeworld,’ the pretheoretical situation in which human beings find themselves, shows another debt to Heidegger and the phenomenological method in general.

However, the crucial issue to examine is the character of that pretheoretical situation, and on this point Strauss and Heidegger widely diverge. In the subsequent discussion of Heidegger’s ‘existentialist’ thought in relation to the general philosophical climate of Europe, Strauss claims that Heidegger “declared that ethics is impossible” during the debate with Ernst Cassirer at Davos, Switzerland in 1929, “and his whole being was permeated by the awareness that this fact opens up an abyss” (“Existentialism,” 304). To say that ethics is impossible means that one considers the question of ‘how should I live,’ one of the permanent and universal questions human beings must face, as permanently

⁶² This is related to Strauss’s statement that Heidegger’s thought “compels one to reflect” (“Correspondence Concerning Modernity,” 107; GS 3, 662). See n. 24 above.

⁶³ We can compare Heidegger to, for example, Descartes’s attempt to isolate the thinking *cogito* without taking into account that human beings are fundamentally *in*, and hence always already in relation to, the world.

unanswerable. The metaphor of an ‘abyss’⁶⁴ that opens in front of human beings stands for the fact that, according to existentialist thought, human beings must *choose*, without ground in reason and hence in light of an *Abgrund*, the way of living from amongst the choices given to them by their historical situation.

Heidegger’s thought was decisively influenced by Husserl, though according to Strauss Heidegger makes the same critique of Husserl that Husserl made of the neo-Kantians: that their thinking was not originary enough. For Heidegger, “the merely sensibly perceived thing [i.e., Husserl’s starting point] is itself derivative...[as] [o]ur primary understanding of the world is not an understanding of things as objects but of what the Greeks indicated by *pragmata*, things which we handle and use” (“Existentialism,” 305).⁶⁵ Perhaps even more importantly, “Heidegger questioned [Husserl’s “horizon,” or starting point, of pure consciousness] by referring to the fact that the inner time belonging to the pure consciousness cannot be understood if one abstracts from the fact that this time is necessarily finite and even constituted by man’s mortality” (“Existentialism,” 305). As a result of these two important radicalizations of not only Husserl but also the general tendencies of modern thought before him, Heidegger caused a revolution in the philosophical climate of the age in which Strauss found himself. According to Strauss, after Heidegger, “[a]ll rational liberal philosophical positions have lost their significance and

⁶⁴ Strauss seems to be using Nietzschean language here. Cf. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), 43, translation modified: “Man is a rope, fastened between animal and overman [*Übermensch*]—a rope over an abyss [*Abgrunde*].”

⁶⁵ Cf. NRH, 79: “The natural world, the world in which we live and act, is not the object or the product of a theoretical attitude; it is a world not of mere objects at which we detachedly look but of ‘things’ or ‘affairs’ which we handle.” The similarity of this passage to *Sein und Zeit*’s description of certain aspects of the structure of *Dasein* is striking.

power...[and] only a great thinker could help us in our intellectual plight. But here is the great trouble, the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger” (“Existentialism,” 305).⁶⁶

Of course, Strauss knows about Heidegger’s choice for National Socialism, and in fact Strauss links Heidegger’s thinking to that of the Nazis in a certain way:

Heidegger became a Nazi in 1933. This was not due to a mere error in judgement on the part of a man of who lived on great heights high above the lowland of politics. Everyone who has read his first great book [i.e., *Sein und Zeit*] and did not overlook the wood for the trees could see the kinship in temper and direction between Heidegger’s thought and the Nazis. What was the practical, that is to say serious meaning of the contempt for reasonableness and the praise of resoluteness which permeated the work except to encourage that extremist movement? (“Existentialism,” 306)

Strauss’s language must be examined carefully here. Strauss says that Heidegger’s thought possesses ‘kinship’ to that of the Nazis, specifically in the practical outcome of *Sein und Zeit*’s ‘contempt for reasonableness and praise of resoluteness.’⁶⁷ This is not to say that Heidegger’s thinking is at its core the same as that of National Socialism, merely that they have, or at least possibly have, the same practical result due to their respective lack of political moderation (or ‘reasonableness’).⁶⁸ Strauss states that

the case of Heidegger reminds to a certain extent of the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, naturally, would not have sided with Hitler. Yet there is an undeniable kinship between Nietzsche’s thought and fascism. If one rejects as passionately as Nietzsche did the conservative constitutional monarchy as well as democracy with a view to a new aristocracy, the passion of the denials

⁶⁶ It is important here to remember Strauss’s claim that Heidegger is not a philosopher as Strauss understands the term; see n. 23 above. Robert B. Pippin criticizes Strauss’s understanding of modern philosophy as a “slippery slope” (*The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 144) claiming instead that there are philosophers who can avoid Strauss’s attack or at least have to be considered not as a stop on the path down to Heidegger. For Pippin, “Strauss’s interpretation of the second wave (or the first crisis) [of modernity, i.e., the wave inaugurated by Rousseau—DT] misinterprets and undervalues the alternatives presented by the German thinkers so influenced by Rousseau, the German Idealists: especially Kant, Fichte, and Hegel” (“The Modern World of Leo Strauss,” 140). This issue, while decisively important, is too large to discuss in the context of this thesis, however.

⁶⁷ I will briefly discuss Heidegger’s almost pathological rejection of ‘common sense,’ present throughout his writings, in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶⁸ The concept of moderation in writing links directly with Strauss’s concept of esotericism, which is to be further examined in chapter 3 of this thesis.

will be much more effective than the necessarily more subtle intimations of the character of the new nobility. (“Existentialism,” 306-307)⁶⁹

At this point, however, Strauss does not speak about the truth or falsity of Heidegger’s thinking, merely that it has a negative practical or political effect.⁷⁰

Strauss now outlines four commonly-believed features of our contemporary situation, and shows how each leads to or is characterized by existentialist thinking. First, according to Strauss, such thinking starts from the experience of anguish (*Angst*), “the basic experience in light of which everything must be understood” (“Existentialism,” 307). *Angst*, according to Heidegger, is what reveals Dasein’s mortality, which in turn ‘throws Dasein back upon itself,’ thereby revealing the temporal character of Dasein’s Being and allowing it to make authentic decisions.⁷¹ However, as Strauss similarly claimed in *Natural Right and History*, “[h]aving this experience is one thing; regarding it as the basic experience is another thing” (“Existentialism,” 307).⁷² Holding *Angst* to be the basic experience of human existence requires argument, but “[t]his argument may be invisible because it is implied in what is generally admitted in our time” (“Existentialism,” 307), i.e., the admission of the discovery of the historically-determined, and hence for Strauss

⁶⁹ Cf. Strauss, “The Three Waves of Modernity,” 98: “[Nietzsche] is as little responsible for fascism as Rousseau is responsible for Jacobinism. This means, however, that he is as much responsible for fascism as Rousseau was for Jacobinism.”

⁷⁰ Contrary to Strauss, Hwa Yol Jung claims that “the political implication of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*...is only diagnostic” (“Heidegger and Strauss,” *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 17 (1987), 208). Jung follows others who believe it impossible to derive an ethical or political implication from the phenomenological examinations of *Sein und Zeit*. Strauss would argue that this is precisely the point: Heidegger declared that a philosophical basis for ethics is ‘impossible,’ which in turn has the consequence of eliminating the possibility to find a secure justification for, say, liberal democracy as opposed to Nazism. This then has the result of, if not encouraging immoderation in politics, then at least preventing the opposition of immoderation through argument. It is arguably incorrect to say, as Jung does, that there is an “inexplicable lacuna between the philosopher who saw the menace of modern anonymity in tune with the existentialist tradition and the man who failed to notice it as the backbone of Nazi totalitarianism” (207). As Stanley Rosen notes, for Heideggerian ontology, “the ontic consequence is to counsel resignation to whatever forces dominate in human history” (*Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 41-42).

⁷¹ This will be elaborated in chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁷² Cf. NRH, 32-33.

ultimately relative, character of all choices of human living, and the subsequent vertiginous loss of ground for those choices. As Strauss says, this discovery is tied to the generally-held belief in progress, thus implying that this discovery is an advance over the thought of the past.

However, the modern belief in progress is usually expressed as the belief in scientific progress, i.e., that science will progress to a point where it will explain the whole and its parts completely. A major problem with this view is that science is simultaneously understood to be ‘value-free,’ i.e., “while science has increased man’s power in ways that former men never dreamt of, it is absolutely incapable to tell men how to *use* that power” (“Existentialism,” 308, Strauss’s emphasis). This divorcing of science and evaluation, or, put another way, the belief in the generally-held notion of the distinction between facts and values, causes human beings to doubt the idea of progress, or the idea that inquiry can be directed toward the goal of a total description of the whole. Strauss says that “[i]t goes without saying that a science which does not allow of value judgements has no longer any possibility of speaking of progress except in the humanly irrelevant sense of scientific progress: the concept of progress has accordingly been replaced by the concept of change” (“Existentialism,” 309). The choice of science as the way to understand the whole, or the way to understand Being, is itself groundless and free, as good (or bad) as any other. For Strauss, this is the second commonly-believed feature of our contemporary situation, namely that “[t]he fundamental freedom is the only non-hypothetical phenomenon...[and hence,] [w]e are already in the midst of existentialism” (“Existentialism,” 309).

Strauss next asks if there is a philosophical position which can withstand the global critique of existentialism. According to Strauss, “the place of rational philosophy proper is taken more and more by what was called in the country of its origin *Weltanschauungslehre*,

theory of comprehensive views” (“Existentialism,” 309). Strauss considers this position to be opposed to any other which claims to have discovered the truth, as for *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*, truth is always relative to a particular comprehensive worldview. Strauss says that

[t]here is only one way out of the predicament in which the doctrine of comprehensive views finds itself and that is to find the ground of the variety of comprehensive views in the human soul or more generally stated in the human condition. If one takes this indispensable step one is again already at the threshold of existentialism. (“Existentialism,” 310)

In noting this third commonly-believed feature of our contemporary situation, Strauss points to the danger of ‘fighting fire with fire,’ or, turning the arguments of existentialism against themselves. According to Strauss, past thinkers argued for a particular understanding of ‘the human condition’ as stemming from a particular metaphysical view; to reverse this relation, to make one’s understanding of ‘the human condition’ the basis for a metaphysical view, is to make the structure of human experience into the basis of metaphysical truth, which, coincidentally, is one of the principal tasks of *Sein und Zeit*.

In regards to the question of values, Strauss next notes that “[p]eople say that we must adopt values and that it is natural for us to adopt the values of our society” (“Existentialism,” 310). However, this means that belief in those values is itself dependent on or is derived from the actual existing society in question, and this fourth commonly-believed feature of our contemporary situation leads us to conclude that “existence precedes essence” (“Existentialism,” 310). As well, to say that we must simply adopt the values of our society is “altogether impossible for serious men” (“Existentialism,” 310). This means, however, that we are left in a situation where we cannot determine the truth or falsity of our own society’s evaluative system, nor that of any other; in a word, we are left in the position of considering all evaluative systems or positions as equal, i.e., the position of relativism.

For Strauss, “[e]xistentialism is a reaction of serious men to their own relativism” (“Existentialism,” 311). The acknowledgement of relativism causes the existentialist experience of anguish due to the lack of rational ground for all evaluation, but we are faced with, as Sartre would say echoing Heidegger, a *‘huis-clos.’*⁷³ There seems to be no exit from relativism for Strauss’s conception of the existentialist.

Turning from his discussion of our contemporary situation and existentialism’s role within it to a more detailed critique, Strauss says that for existentialism, “[a]ll truth, all meaning is seen in the last analysis to have no support except man’s freedom” (“Existentialism,” 311). There is no possibility of discovering objective truth independent of the structure of human experience, either metaphysically or ethically. Even the anguish that results from this realization cannot be understood conceptually or objectively, for “[m]an freely originates meaning, he originates the horizon, the absolute presupposition, the ideal, the project within which understanding and life are possible” (“Existentialism,” 311). Anguish, for it to have meaning, must be subjectively or really lived. Strauss here is not claiming that Heidegger’s thinking leads to an arbitrary decisionism, however, for “man *always lives already* within such a horizon without being aware of its character” (“Existentialism,” 311, my emphasis).⁷⁴ As well, human beings are essentially social, and thus “[t]o be in an authentic way means to be in an authentic way with others” (“Existentialism,” 311).⁷⁵ Authenticity, for Strauss, means

⁷³ Cf. Heidegger, GA 40, 167: “Insofar as man *is*, he stands in the no-exit of death [*der Ausweglosigkeit des Todes*]” (my translation). I am grateful to Robert B. Pippin (*The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 74 n. 35) for pointing out this statement.

⁷⁴ I have added emphasis to show Strauss’s usage of terminology translated directly from *Sein und Zeit*, *‘immer schon’* (e.g., Heidegger’s conception of “Nur-immer-schon-bei,” SZ, 195, which characterizes Dasein’s always-already being absorbed into its world, which in turn finds its meaning from that which *das Man* considers to be its meaning).

⁷⁵ Strauss also notes here that “there would seem to exist the possibility of an existentialist ethics which have to be however a strictly formal ethics. However this may be, Heidegger never believed in the possibility of an

to risk oneself resolutely, despising sham certainties (and all objective certainties are sham). Only if man *is* in this way do the things in the world reveal themselves to him as they are. The concern with objective certainty necessarily narrows the horizon. It leads to the consequence that man erects around himself an artificial setting which conceals from him the abyss of which he must be aware to be truly human. To live dangerously means to think exposedly. (“Existentialism,” 311)

Strauss here identifies his conception of Heidegger’s distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity: either recognize absolute freedom in which to make one’s choices but at the same time resolutely uphold them (authentic), or attempt to ground one’s choices in objective certainty (inauthentic). Strauss’s language also indicates the perilous character of authentic choosing, as the authentic situation for human beings is to be ‘suspended over the abyss.’ For the existentialist, “[m]an cannot understand himself in the light of the whole, in the light of his origin or his end” (“Existentialism,” 311). To make a point of comparison, for Heidegger it is precisely Dasein’s thrownness into and cessation of existence, the origin and end of an individual human life, respectively, which determine the parameters of the meaning of *Sein* for Dasein; and yet, under the rubric of *Sein und Zeit*, one cannot investigate the essential character of that thrownness, nor what the cessation of being means for Dasein (other than ‘the possibility which is not to be outstripped’ (*unüberholbare*).⁷⁶ The origin and the end provide the framework for an understanding of *Sein*; they do not provide the understanding itself. Ultimately, Heidegger’s thought precludes the possibility of understanding oneself in relation to a permanent and stable

ethics” (“Existentialism,” 311). Strauss is noting the ethical, pseudo-Kantian implications of Heidegger’s thought; these implications can also be seen if one considers Heidegger’s idea of *Mitsein*, a characteristic of Dasein, as essentially ‘being-with-others;’ see SZ, 160). But cf. “Existentialism,” 312: “existentialism restores Kant’s notion of an unknowable thing-in-itself and of man’s ability to grasp the fact of his freedom at the limits of objective knowledge and as the ground of objective knowledge. But in existentialism there is no moral law and no other world.”

⁷⁶ See SZ, 250.

conception of human nature, i.e., understanding oneself in relation to a natural whole of which an individual human being is a part.

Strauss next notes Heidegger's agreement with Plato and Aristotle in regards to two points: 1) "that the question of what is *to be* is the fundamental question;" and 2) "that the fundamental question must be primarily addressed to that being which *is* in the most emphatic or the most authoritative way" ("Existentialism," 312, Strauss's emphasis).⁷⁷ We find an echo of this statement in Heidegger's introduction to *Sein und Zeit*.⁷⁸ However, for Strauss, Heidegger fundamentally disagrees with Plato and Aristotle, as "according to [them] to be in the highest sense meant to be always, [while] Heidegger contends that to be in the highest sense means to exist, that is to say, to be in the manner which man is: to be in the highest sense is constituted by mortality" ("Existentialism," 312). This means that the question remains the same for both the ancient Greeks and Heidegger; however, the method for determining the answer, conditioned as it is by Heidegger's rejection of eternity and limitation of focus on those beings which are mortal or temporal, differs greatly. As Strauss

⁷⁷ It is important to note that if Strauss considers himself to be a Socratic thinker, or at least following the Socratic model of philosophy, then he must also consider the question of Being to be the highest, and that the question must be addressed to human beings first and foremost. However, for Strauss, in order to address the question properly, human beings must be examined as they are pretheoretically, i.e., as they are in *political* life. As Neil Robertson says, "[t]he 'originary' encounter is, for Strauss, not for the human as Dasein, but for the human as citizen, as a certain 'type' structured by a shared moral and political life" ("Leo Strauss's Platonism," 2). The question of Being must be answered from the basis of an examination of the structure and elements of the particular political situation in which the questioner finds him- or herself. Velkley claims that "[Heidegger's] questioning is unable to see clearly the political-moral phenomena which must nourish it; a questioning that cannot see these phenomena cannot gain true distance on them, and so risks becoming their slave" ("Freedom from the Good: Heidegger's Idealist Grounding in Politics," in *Logos and Eros: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2006), 259). Hwa Yol Jung is incorrect, then, in stating that Strauss's position "neglects to explore and show the way in which the 'theoretical attitude' is dependent upon the 'natural attitude'" (*The Crisis of Political Understanding*, 155). On the contrary, for Strauss this is one of, if not *the*, most important questions with which to grapple. It suffices to examine the title and introduction of one of Strauss's books, *The City and Man*. I will return to this subject in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁷⁸ "Therefore fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein," BT, 34, emphasis removed ("Daher muss die *Fundamentalontologie*, aus der alle andern erst entspringt können, in der *existenzialen Analytik des Daseins* gesucht werden," SZ, 13).

notes, “[p]hilosophy thus becomes analytics of existence,” i.e., what we find in the pages of *Sein und Zeit* and what Strauss calls “[t]he great achievement of Heidegger” (“Existentialism,” 312).

However, this is not to say that Heidegger’s subsequent analysis can be considered as objectively true. Strauss claims that, in order to be consistent with itself, it is necessary to consider “existential philosophy [to be] subjective truth about subjective truth” (“Existentialism,” 312). The problem remains that *Sein und Zeit* could only be considered as one possible analysis of existence, for if Heidegger intended us to take seriously the later sections on the historicity of Dasein, the structures of Dasein themselves must be subject to change or revision.⁷⁹

Heidegger, claims Strauss, thus broke with existentialism, i.e., his earlier thought, due to what Strauss identifies as four difficulties: 1) as was mentioned above, Heidegger wished to reject traditional claims or structures concerning human existence, especially those arising from Christian theology, and yet *Sein und Zeit*’s categories are evidently of Christian theological origin (“conscience, guilt, being-unto-death, anguish”); 2) as was also mentioned above, the analytics of existence may have been “fundamentally arbitrary” due to its historical, and hence impermanent, character; 3) it is a fact that beings, i.e., natural beings, exist apart from human beings, even though Heidegger is said to have claimed that

⁷⁹ “*Sein und Zeit* had described human existence, but it had left unanswered whether or not these *Existenzialien* are universal categories. For in that work human existence had been understood only preliminarily; its ultimate understanding was to be achieved in terms of *Sein* which was as yet not understood. But Heidegger’s later works do seek to understand *Sein*, and to understand it historically. That is, *Sein* is understood as manifesting itself differently in different periods of *Seinsgeschichte*. Consequently, the *Existenzialien* which structure human existence must, in the end, be understood historically as well” (Emil Fackenheim, *Metaphysics and Historicity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961), 78). Fackenheim expresses much the same thing as Gadamer concerning the possibility of a non-historicist overcoming of historicism; see n. 44 above.

“there can be no truth and hence no *to be*, if there are no human beings;”⁸⁰ and 4) the fundamental finiteness of Dasein can only be understood as such with some sort of awareness of infinity, which is disallowed by Heidegger’s analysis (“Existentialism,” 313). Strauss claims that “the relation of Heidegger to his own existentialism is the same as that of Hegel to Kant” (“Existentialism,” 313). This statement can be explained through examining the analogy of Hegel’s understanding of the history of philosophy as a series of moments in a progression toward absolute reason, an understanding which differs in kind from Kant’s claim that absolute knowledge of what truly is, i.e., absolute knowledge of the world of the *Ding-an-sich*, is impossible. Following the analogy, then, Heidegger turns to an investigation of the history of *Sein* which leads away from the quasi-transcendental structure of *Sein und Zeit*.⁸¹

Expanding on this claim, Strauss says that

existentialism claims to be *the* insight into the essential character of man, the final insight which as such would belong to the final time, to the fullness of time. And yet existentialism denies the possibility of a fullness of time: the historical process is unfinishable; man is and always will be a historical being. In other words existentialism claims to be the understanding of the historicity of man and yet it does not reflect about its own historicity, of its belonging to a specific situation of western man. (“Existentialism,” 313)

According to Strauss, Heidegger did not reject his own existentialism on the right basis, because he did not recognize its fundamentally political-philosophical character, one that it

⁸⁰ Strauss here repeats a criticism he made in NRH, 31. Karl Löwith makes the same criticism of Heidegger; cf. Löwith, “The Nature of Man and the World of Nature: For Heidegger’s 80th Birthday,” in *Martin Heidegger in Europe and America*, 45. Löwith also notes Heidegger’s turn from the Dasein-centric understanding of nature, a turn found in Heidegger’s later works. See also Strauss’s letter to Löwith cited in n. 47 above.

⁸¹ Post-*Kehre* Heidegger would not consider the history of *Sein* to be teleological as Hegel would, preferring instead to consider *Sein* as that which enters and withdraws without explanation or reason: as the ground of reason, *Sein* must necessarily be beyond or outside of reason. Nevertheless, Heidegger’s ‘rejection’ of the analytics of existence and turn to the history of *Sein* is an echo of the relation between Kant and Hegel.

shares with all other modern philosophical positions.⁸² Reflecting his understanding of the ‘crisis of modernity,’ Strauss claims that existentialism belongs to the situation of contemporary liberal democracy, specifically “a liberal democracy which has become uncertain of itself or of its future. Existentialism belongs to the decline of Europe or of the West” (“Existentialism,” 314).⁸³

Existentialism’s greatest insight, transmitted throughout Heidegger’s works, is that human beings are fundamentally characterized by their historicity, and if this leads to the impossibility of discovering permanent and universal answers to philosophical questions concerning the best way of life, then, according to Strauss, “[h]istory has come to an end” (“Existentialism,” 314). The final claim concerning the relation of human beings to the whole is that the relation is fundamentally arbitrary and subject to permanent flux, and as a result the goal of philosophy as Strauss understands it is permanently disallowed. This claim is the final outcome of what Strauss understands to be the ‘crisis of the West.’ Heidegger has radicalized and completed the path of a tendency in modern thought that has continued, claims Strauss, since Machiavelli in the form of three revolutionary moments which constitute breaks in a series of continuous radicalizations.⁸⁴ Strauss understands the crisis to be primarily one of political philosophy, however, and it is also important to have in mind here Strauss’s dual sense of political philosophy, namely that it is both philosophical examination of political subjects and philosophizing in a political manner.⁸⁵ Contrasting Plato and Nietzsche, Strauss characterizes Plato, an archetypal political philosopher in the second sense for Strauss, as ‘intimating’ rather than ‘stating’ his

⁸² Here we see justification for the statement that “Strauss has shown that the foundations of historicism have nothing to do with history or historical study and everything to do with the political intentions of the founders of modernity” (Ward, “Political Philosophy and History,” 295).

⁸³ See the discussion of CM, 3-7 in the introduction to this thesis.

⁸⁴ See Strauss’s “The Three Waves of Modernity” for a detailed description of this process.

⁸⁵ I discuss Strauss’s dual sense of political philosophy further in chapter 3 of this thesis

“deepest insights” (“Existentialism,” 315), as opposed to the inflammatory political bombast of Nietzsche’s texts. Strauss criticizes Heidegger because of the political effect Heidegger’s explicitness causes, much in the same way he criticizes Rousseau and Nietzsche as being ultimately responsible, through political ‘perversions’ of their philosophical positions, for Jacobinism and fascism, respectively.⁸⁶ For Strauss, Heidegger’s rhetoric encourages extremism, or at least does not encourage moderation⁸⁷—which for Strauss is constituted by the balance between the competing virtues of philosophical wisdom and political justice.⁸⁸

It is in his discussion of Nietzsche that Strauss notes the character of post-Nietzschean philosophy:

the philosopher of the future as distinguished from the classical philosophers will be concerned with the holy. His philosophizing will be intrinsically religious. This does not mean that he believes in God, the biblical God. He is

⁸⁶ See Strauss, “The Three Waves of Modernity,” 98; cf. “German Nihilism,” 372, for an almost verbatim repetition of these remarks concerning Rousseau’s and Nietzsche’s respective political effects.

⁸⁷ “All transcendent, i.e., transhistorical, ethical and political principles that could support or induce moderation and a critical stand toward the given goals of one’s own historical situation are disparaged as ‘untimely’ or superficial [by Heidegger]. Can this have nothing to do with Heidegger’s albeit temporary infatuation with National Socialism?” (Laurence Berns, “Heidegger and Strauss: Temporality, Religion, and Political Philosophy,” *Interpretation* vol. 27, no. 2 (Winter 1999-2000), 103). Horst Mewes claims that “Strauss is in sympathy with Heidegger’s philosophical mania, but denounces his inability to see the need for philosophical prudence, especially if Heidegger’s philosophy leads him to mistake the politics of National Socialism as a new stage in the manifestation of being” (“Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger: Greek Antiquity and the Meaning of Modernity,” in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 111). Alan Udoff claims that “Heidegger, in Strauss’s view, is the extreme case of philosophical greatness exposed without the protection of the commonsense wisdom that secures our place—even if we mean by that refuge in the city wall—amid the human things” (“On Leo Strauss,” in *Leo Strauss’s Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*, 11). In all of these cases, the interpreters believe Strauss to have interpreted Heidegger’s choice for Nazism as a result of his lack of a sense of the political, and hence private, nature of philosophical mania. I will return to this subject in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁸⁸ “In itself wisdom stands supreme, but justice stands supreme from an exoteric point of view” (Strauss, PPH, 147). Janssens summarizes Strauss’s position by noting that “although the philosopher as such transcends the political realm, as a human being he owes obedience to the laws of the polis and respect to its opinions” (*Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 162). Lest one imagine that it is possible to derive a fundamentally conservative political position from Janssens’s summary, it is important to remember that Strauss believed “[t]he philosopher as philosopher is responsible to the city only to the extent that by doing his own work, by his own well-being, he contributes to the well-being of the city” (LAM, 15). Ultimately, Strauss upholds the political position of or for *philosophers*, one which fundamentally differs from the positions of those involved in the contemporary debates between liberalism and conservatism, neo- or otherwise.

an atheist, but an atheist who is waiting for a god who has not yet shown himself. (“Existentialism,” 315)⁸⁹

Early Heidegger, Strauss had been claiming since 1932, borrowed or depended on fundamentally Christian theological categories for his analytic of Dasein. The later Heidegger’s turn to *Gelassenheit*, or ‘letting beings be,’ can be construed as a turn to a more ‘monastic’ style of comportment, one which entails allowing that which reveals itself to reveal itself from out of itself and thereby counteracts the dissemination and influence of technological thinking. The thought of both early and later Heidegger seems to confirm Strauss’s imputation of ‘religious atheism’ to that thought.⁹⁰

However, Strauss does agree with Heidegger concerning the problem of scientific or technological thinking. We can hear echoes of Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology* in Strauss’s claim that “[m]an’s humanity is threatened with extinction by technology” (“Existentialism,” 316).⁹¹ Technological thinking has as its root the concept that “the grounds of the whole are essentially intelligible: at the disposal of man as man—that they are *always*” (“Existentialism,” 317). Is Strauss agreeing with Heidegger that the beginning of technological thinking is found in the thought of Plato and Aristotle and their

⁸⁹ Also, the final sentence of this passage seemingly echoes the title of Heidegger’s posthumous *Der Spiegel* interview: “Nur ein Gott kann uns retten.” See chapter 2 of this thesis for an analysis of Heidegger’s ‘religious’ thinking.

⁹⁰ There is a connection between Strauss’s imputation of ‘religious thinking’ to Heidegger and Strauss’s position, identified by Velkley, that “historicism is from start to finish connected with ‘divination’...and not with *theoria*” (“On the Roots of Rationalism,” 249), i.e., one’s view or knowledge of the whole depends fundamentally on a ‘mysterious dispensation of fate,’ and cannot be derived from a theoretical examination which claims to discover immutable principles concerning the whole. For Mewes, “[w]ith the disappearance of the distinction between nature and revelation, stressed in the work of Strauss, disappears also the traditional distinction between reason and faith, between investigation of nature by natural reason and knowledge of God through faith in his revealed world” (“Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger: Greek Antiquity and the Meaning of Modernity,” in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 117). I will attempt to outline a possible Heideggerian response to these accusations in chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁹¹ Strauss is not just speaking of the possibility of atomic destruction. Rather, it is now possible that what it means to be human can be forever lost due to the technological understanding turning its gaze toward human beings. Cf. Heidegger, QT, 28; GA 7, 29; and Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 1.

position that the highest sense of ‘to be’ is ‘to be always’? Yes and no. Strauss believes Plato and Aristotle to hold that the highest form of ‘to be’ is ‘to be always,’ but it is the modern tendency in philosophy, or enlisting of philosophy for the ‘relief of man’s estate’ and thereby the attempt to make human beings absolute masters of their own fate, which has caused the rise of technological thinking. While related to the rise and totalizing quality of scientific thinking, the crisis is ultimately caused by the political enlistment of philosophy. For Strauss, as for Heidegger, the only hope for a solution to the crisis can arise from a ‘meeting’ with ‘Eastern’ ways of thinking, which holds that “to be means to be elusive or to be a mystery” (“Existentialism,” 317). However, “the meeting of west and east can only be a meeting of the deepest roots of both;” Strauss follows with a one-sentence paragraph—“Heidegger is the only man who has an inkling of the dimensions of the problem of a world society” (“Existentialism,” 317).⁹² I gesture toward an explanation of this striking and perplexing claim by noting that this meeting must occur at the level of the deepest question, i.e., what does it mean for beings to be? Hence, the two forms of an answer to this question, ‘to be always’ and ‘to be elusive/mysterious’ must, in some sense, be understood together. This situation, however, is immediately confounded by the evident mutual refutation of the two positions, ones which correspond to their origins in reason and revelation, respectively. Strauss is thus connecting this ultimate tension between reason and revelation to politics, specifically the problem of a world society in which the mutually

⁹² Cf. Heidegger, “Science and Reflection” (in QT, 157-158; GA 7, 41): “[w]hoever today dares, questioningly, reflectingly, and, in this way already as actively involved, to respond to the profundity of the world shock that we experience every hour, must not only pay heed to the fact that our present-day world is completely dominated by the desire to know of modern science; he must consider also, and above all else, that every reflection [*Besinnung*] upon that which now is can take its rise and thrive only if, through a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language, it strikes root into the ground of our historical existence [*geschichtlichen Daseins*]. That dialogue still awaits its beginning. It is scarcely prepared for at all, and yet it itself remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world.” Strauss’s comments concerning Heidegger in the rest of “Existentialism” seem to acknowledge Heidegger’s statement.

exclusive positions of reason and revelation, of Athens and Jerusalem, are problematically united.⁹³

Indeed, Strauss follows the one-sentence paragraph by claiming that

within the west the limitations of rationalism were always seen by the biblical tradition. (Here lies the justification for the biblical element in Heidegger's earlier thought.) But this must be rightly understood. Biblical thought is one form of Eastern thought. By taking the Bible as absolute, one blocks access to other forms of eastern thought. Yet the Bible is the East within us, within western man. Not the Bible as Bible but the Bible as eastern can help us in overcoming Greek rationalism. ("Existentialism," 317)

We must pause to explain this important passage. Heidegger's earlier 'atheistic religious' thinking, showing as it does the limits of rationalism, is claimed merely to reveal what religious thinking has always known, i.e., that beyond the end or breakdown of reason lies faith or piety, and that faith or piety is the deeper ground upon which to base human living. These limits of rationalism were since forgotten by early modern philosophers, who claimed that the human mind can know with absolute certainty,⁹⁴ thereby rejecting the notion that 'to be' means 'to be elusive.' However, Strauss is not merely agreeing with this criticism of specifically modern philosophy; in fact, he is saying that the problem lies in *Greek* rationalism, which must be 'overcome.' I interpret this to mean that Greek rationalism must be 'dethroned' from its position as the only source for human knowledge, or at least shown to be as likely or unlikely as its challenger, revelation. Strauss, as was

⁹³ In the context of a discussion directed against Kojève, Strauss argues that "the coming of the universal and homogeneous state will be the end of philosophy on earth" (OT, 211). Strauss is careful to distinguish Heidegger as a 'thinker' rather than a 'philosopher,' and so it seems that there would still be room for Heideggerian *Denken* after the death of philosophy. It is interesting to note that Heidegger also believed *Denken* to be altogether different from and to arrive after the end of philosophy.

⁹⁴ Descartes is an example of this, although Strauss determines the origin of this position ultimately to be found in Machiavelli, who "is the first philosopher who believes that the coincidence of philosophy and political power can be brought about by propaganda which wins over ever larger multitudes to the new modes and orders and thus transforms the thought of one or a few into the opinion of the public and therewith into public power" (TM, 173). There are evident connections to Strauss's interpretation of Machiavelli as the first modern and Heidegger as the last or most radical one; cf. Heidegger's connection of philosophy to "the knowledge in which and by which a people [*ein Volk*] conceives its Dasein in the historical-spiritual world and brings it to fulfillment" (IM, 11, Fried and Polt translation; GA 40, 12).

mentioned above, characterizes the debate in this way, and his language here, near the conclusion of the essay, may be hyperbolic.⁹⁵

Regardless, Strauss expands upon the nature of this meeting in the following way:

[t]he deepest root of the west is a specific understanding of being, a specific experience of being. The specifically western experience of being led to the consequence that the ground of grounds was forgotten and the primary experience of being was used only for the investigation of beings. The east has experienced being in a way which prevented the investigation of beings and therewith the concern with the mastery of beings. (“Existentialism,” 317-318)

We are thus left with two seemingly incommensurable approaches to understanding *Sein*, one which allows for the necessarily propaedeutic investigation into *Seiendes* but results in the attempt to master them, the other preventing such an investigation and resulting in a religious, pious outlook. This incommensurability is a problem, according to Strauss the highest and deepest problem. However, this is not to say that Heidegger’s work leads us to a dead end: “by opening ourselves to the problem of being and to the problematic character of the western understanding of being, we may gain access to the deepest root of the east” (“Existentialism,” 318). Heidegger’s investigations, claims Strauss, have allowed for the renewal of the question which Strauss considers to be the most important of all, the question of reason versus revelation or ‘the theologico-political problem.’

Heidegger may also have collapsed the two sides of the conflict into one, thereby ‘solving’ the ‘insoluble problem.’⁹⁶ It is at this point in the lecture that we find a summary of one of

⁹⁵ This lecture is intended for a Jewish audience, as was noted in the opening paragraph of the article, and, following Strauss’s own hermeneutic principle, the audience toward which a work is directed must be taken into consideration when attempting to interpret that work. A detailed elaboration of Strauss’s conception of hermeneutics will be found in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁹⁶ Elaborating on Strauss’s discussion, Berns notes a profound ambiguity for Strauss concerning the practical result of Heidegger’s teaching. For Berns, Heidegger chose Nazism due to a “spiritual resonance with the National Socialist Revolution;” at the same time, “Heidegger tried to prepare the ground, a possible common but deeper ground for the meeting of East and West in dialogue. The ground Heidegger tried to prepare was to make is possible for each side to preserve something of its own noble depths while joining with the other to

Strauss's most important critiques of Heidegger: "*Esse* [that is, Being] as Heidegger understands it may be described crudely and superficially and even misleadingly, but not altogether misleadingly, by saying that it is a synthesis of the Platonic ideas and the biblical God: it is as impersonal as the Platonic ideas and as elusive as the biblical God" ("Existentialism," 318). Instead of attempting to set up a confrontation of western and eastern understandings of Being, Strauss claims that Heidegger amalgamates the two into one 'confused' understanding. This amalgamation rejects the possibility of openness to both, or learning from both, the position which Strauss promotes. Heidegger dissolves the tension, while Strauss wishes to preserve it.⁹⁷ While allowing for renewed access to the ground of the theologico-political problem, Heidegger also evades it, and in doing so was "forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely because [he] did nothing but talk of Being" (OT, 212).⁹⁸

The next text which I will address is "Kurt Riezler," a eulogy presented to a University of Chicago audience in 1956 and published in *What is Political Philosophy?* in 1959. Here, Strauss continues to discuss the problem of Heidegger's thought for political philosophy. Strauss claims Heidegger's power to have caused a "paralysis of the critical faculties," and that since the arrival of *Sein und Zeit*, "philosophizing seems to have transformed into listening with reverence to the incipient *mythoi* of Heidegger" (WIPP,

forge the unified humanity imposed on us by...history? Destiny? The gods?" ("The Prescientific World and Historicism," 177).

⁹⁷ For Strauss, claims Velkley, "Heidegger's thought is based on an act of believing or willing" ("On the Roots of Rationalism," 257), and thus is in conflict with philosophy which claims not to be based on belief but rather to be based on the discovery of truth. However, cf. Strauss's discussion of the possibility that *philosophy* is based "on an unevident, arbitrary, or blind decision" (NRH, 75). Following from this possibility, Tanguay notes the problem inherent in Strauss's conception of the tension between reason and revelation: "[t]he philosopher who takes revelation seriously can therefore never have complete assurance as to the adequate grounding of his own life. He cannot know whether his life does not rest upon an illusion" (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 215).

⁹⁸ For Gregory Bruce Smith, "[a]ccording to Strauss, Heidegger destroys Reason and is thereby forced to go over to the side of the gods of the poets. Religion ultimately gains hegemony and no place is left for philosophy" ("The Post-Modern Leo Strauss?," 195).

246). Heidegger's thinking, as evidently distinguished from philosophizing, is concerned with the analysis of *Existenz*, and such an analysis "is meant to be fundamental ontology, i.e., 'the first philosophy,' for philosophy is nothing other than ontology" (WIPP, 247).⁹⁹

According to Strauss,

[o]ne can express Heidegger's notion of ontology most simply by using Platonic expressions in an un-Platonic sense. Ontology is concerned, not with beings, but with that which we mean whenever we say of anything that it 'is,' or with that by virtue of which beings are, or with that through partaking of which beings are and are said to be; this—*esse* as distinguished from *entia*—as the ground of all beings is not a being but beyond being and beingness. (WIPP, 247)

Here we find the continuation of Strauss's critique of 'radical historicist ontology,' hinted at in *Natural Right and History* but not attempted there.¹⁰⁰ It is important to remember that for Heidegger, Strauss claims, "ontology is inseparable from the '*Destruktion*' of the philosophic tradition" (WIPP, 248). For Heidegger, fundamental ontology cannot find ground unless the tradition on which it is based, specifically that tradition which claims that 'to be' means 'to be present,' is subject to *Destruktion*.

Strauss makes one more claim concerning Heidegger in this text, which is curious and perplexing. Strauss wonders about "the riddle posed by Heidegger's obstinate silence about love or charity on the one hand, and about laughter and the things which deserve to be laughed at on the other" (WIPP, 260). We can interpret this claim in the following way. Concerning laughter, Heidegger's emphasis on the tragic side of human existence, a position which bases itself purely on the negative elements of human experience (anxiety, boredom, etc.), misses the positive side and thus presents an incomplete understanding of

⁹⁹ The final clause of this quotation indicates one of the most important differences between the thought of Heidegger and that of Strauss: what counts as 'first philosophy.' I will investigate this difference in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. NRH, 31.

human existence. Concerning love and charity, Heidegger's religious thinking, specifically his 'Christianness,' misses the important element of the teaching of Christianity, the idea of the unconditional love of Jesus. For Strauss, the two aspects of the critique point to Heidegger's problematic conception of human existence.'¹⁰¹

Parenthetically, in 1961 Strauss begins an exchange of letters with Gadamer, subsequent to the publication of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.¹⁰² Strauss notes that what he calls Gadamer's "doctrine" is itself "a translation of Heidegger's questions, analyses and hints into a more academic medium" ("Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 5). For Strauss, this amounts to avoiding that which is crucial in Heidegger, i.e., that Heidegger's thought is "essentially contemporary with the approach of the 'world-night' or the *Untergang des Abendlands*" ("Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 5). The relation to the historical-political situation to which Heidegger responds is lost in the academic distillation presented in *Wahrheit und Methode*.¹⁰³ In fact, Strauss goes further, stating that Gadamer's Heideggerian hermeneutics are themselves a *consequence* of the crisis of modernity as Strauss understands it. Gadamer's lack of comprehending the situation as a historical-political crisis, one which both Strauss and

¹⁰¹ Ward understands this passage in much the same way, claiming that Strauss "criticizes Heidegger for ignoring or choosing to abstract from the natural articulation of experience" ("Political Philosophy and History," 287). Love, charity, and laughter are all natural elements of human existence, but this is not evidently the case if one examines the analysis presented in *Sein und Zeit*. Understanding the problem from a different perspective, Thomas L. Pangle notes, "tears, or a 'tragic sense of life,' is certainly alien to the philosophic experience as portrayed in the life of Socrates" ("On the Epistolary Dialogue between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin," in *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, 247). Strauss himself says as much in a letter to Eric Voegelin from June 4, 1951: "[o]n the basis of known statements about Plato one might say that tragedy and the *polis* belong together—correspondingly comedy and doubt about the *polis* belong together" (FPP, 90). There is an insight here into the connection between Heidegger's emphasis on the 'tragic sense of life' and his continuous focus in *Sein und Zeit* on the ontological structure of everyday life, which for Strauss, by contrast, is fundamentally political in character.

¹⁰² Strauss with Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *The Independent Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (1978), 5-12.

¹⁰³ Gadamer evidently agrees with Strauss's assessment; see Gadamer's response in a letter from April 5, 1961 ("Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 8).

Heidegger consider to be the gravest problem facing contemporary humanity, is a result of his attempting to tame Heideggerian radicality for the sake of academic acceptance.¹⁰⁴

The last text I will examine from the period of Strauss's direct confrontation with Heidegger is "Relativism," published in 1961. This essay repeats much of the structure of the "Existentialism" lecture discussed above, but now Strauss's concern is primarily with the ethical consequences of Heidegger's position. Here, Strauss claims existentialism to be derived from a combination of the thought of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and even goes so far as to claim that in Heidegger's "first great publication," presumably *Sein und Zeit*, "the influence of Kierkegaard was indeed as powerful as that of Nietzsche" ("Relativism," 151). However, after *Sein und Zeit*, claims Strauss, Nietzsche was the main influence on Heidegger's thinking. A discussion of the relation between Heidegger and Nietzsche, not to mention the relation between Strauss and Nietzsche, must be left for another time. For now, we can note in passing that Strauss believes Nietzsche to respond to the 'supremacy of history' by a return to the 'supremacy of nature,' and it is this return to nature against which Heidegger reacts ("Relativism," 153).¹⁰⁵ For Strauss, Heideggerian thinking "teaches that being is essentially or radically mysterious and that the fundamental defect of metaphysics is the assumption upon which it is based—the assumption that being is as such intelligible" ("Relativism," 154). Again we see Strauss's religious interpretation of Heideggerian thinking, similar to the interpretation found in "Existentialism" and discussed above. If being is essentially mysterious, then any understanding of the meaning of being must be tentative at best; it is impossible to discover a meaning of being that is not merely

¹⁰⁴ I discuss the correspondence between Gadamer and Strauss further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ This is an allusion to Heidegger's critical stance toward Nietzsche's purported 'return to metaphysics;' cf. Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: God is Dead," in *Off the Beaten Track*, 162-163; GA 5, 217. It is also important to note that Strauss notices that the idea of a return to the 'supremacy of reason' is never considered to be a viable option by either Heidegger or Nietzsche.

hypothetical. For Heidegger, claims Strauss, “the only phenomenon that is not hypothetical is the abyss of freedom” (“Relativism,” 154). This abyss signifies the ‘fact’ that “man is compelled to choose groundlessly,” in the sense that “all principles of thought and action” are objectively “groundless,” or, there is no objective basis to choose one particular way of life, but the choice nevertheless must be made in light of this “nothingness” (“Relativism,” 154-155).

As a result of this realization, philosophy changes into analysis of what Strauss, with Heidegger, calls *Existenz*. *Existenz* is the way that human beings *are*, and is itself “directly constituted by the fundamental nothingness” (“Relativism,” 155). *Existenz* has the character of authenticity or inauthenticity, which for Strauss means that “the analytics of *Existenz* contains...an ethics, even if only a formal ethics: to the extent to which one understands *Existenz*, one realizes the character of the truly human” (“Relativism,” 155).

Strauss elaborates:

[t]he ethics is formal since it is based, not on the nature of man, on man’s beingness, but on the human situation or, somewhat more precisely, on man’s manner of being. Hence, it does not say that the good life is the life according to the nature of man, but it does say, in effect, that the good life is the life according to the essential character of *Existenz*. (“Relativism,” 155)

However, Strauss does not claim that Heidegger himself would allow this interpretation.

According to Strauss, such an ethical position would amount to an

objective teaching, or it would supply final knowledge, infinite knowledge. Yet the analytics of *Existenz* is necessarily based on a specific ideal of *Existenz*, on a specific commitment: for only committed thought can understand commitment and hence *Existenz*. In other words, existential philosophy is subjective truth about the subjectivity of truth or finite knowledge of man’s finiteness. (“Relativism,” 155)¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Smith argues that for Heidegger, “[e]thics had to be grounded in a closed ‘World,’ situated between native Earth and Sky that enfolds the gods” (“The Post-Modern Leo Strauss?”, 192). Heidegger, it may be argued, holds ethics to have a religious character, in the sense that the realm of ethics, the public realm, is

The final sentence of the above quotation seems to consign Heidegger's early thinking to a self-referential paradox: how can he claim that the analytic of Dasein is indeed ontological when any understanding of ontology, or any understanding of the meaning of Being, is itself a function of one's historical situation? Or, in Strauss's words, "how can finiteness be seen as finiteness if it is not seen in the light of the infinite" ("Relativism," 155)? According to Strauss, "[t]hese and similar difficulties led Heidegger to a very thorough revision of his doctrine" ("Relativism," 155).¹⁰⁷ However, Strauss is uncertain that Heidegger escaped the "fundamental relativism" ("Relativism," 155) of his earlier position. The evidence for this is that even the later Heidegger considers himself, according to Strauss, to understand "the great thinkers of the past in the decisive respect better than they understood themselves" ("Relativism," 155).¹⁰⁸ For Heidegger, all past thinkers have not recognized the inherent position concerning the meaning of *Sein* lurking at the base of their respective philosophical positions. Thus, Heidegger claims to understand those positions better than the authors themselves understood them. In doing this, Strauss would say, Heidegger shows his dependence on the Kantian, and thereby the quintessentially modern, interpretive framework. Here as elsewhere in this period of his career, Strauss silently distinguishes his own interpretive position from Heidegger's, and consequently from all modern thought in general.

fundamentally religious in character. As we shall see in chapter 3 of this thesis, this is remarkably close to Strauss's position.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. "Existentialism," 313, discussed above.

¹⁰⁸ I discuss this point further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

1.4 1962-1973: Socratic Return

Later in life Strauss seemed to turn away from his constant battle against radical historicism, writing instead finally on those thinkers who guided him to his mature understanding of Socrates and Socratic philosophy: Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes. It is only in the later period that we finally find book-length studies on these ancient thinkers' respective conceptions of Socrates. However, this seeming turning away was in fact a return. Strauss's turn finally to ancient thought was possible through the long detour backwards in time, from Spinoza and Hobbes to Machiavelli as the start of modernity, and finally to Socrates as an object of study. After conducting a frontal attack on radical historicism, "Strauss no longer felt bound to make any compromises or to see the texts through the screen of scholarly method and categories. He had liberated himself and could understand the writers as they understood themselves" (Bloom, *Giants and Dwarves*, 247). Hyperbolic as Bloom's claim may be, there is definitely a shift in focus after the period of Strauss's direct confrontation with Heidegger. This shift in focus appears in the texts from this period which address Heidegger, developing gradually at first but in full bloom by the end of Strauss's career and life. Strauss had made his case against radical historicism, and even though he would continue to engage it, his attention shifted explicitly to the ancient philosophers in light of whose books he had always worked.

The first text that I will examine from this period, the 'autobiographical' Preface to Strauss's book, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, published in 1962,¹⁰⁹ continues to develop the links between Heidegger's thought and religion. There, Strauss calls Heidegger a paradigmatic example of 'new thinking,' which was originated, according to Strauss, by

¹⁰⁹ The Preface also appears in JPCM, and it is to this edition that I make reference.

Franz Rosenzweig. ‘New thinking’ was fundamentally religious, in the sense that it promoted an orthodox view of religion as fundamentally separate from and in conflict with reason. For Strauss, and in contradistinction to Rosenzweig’s new thinking, “it was obvious that Heidegger’s new thinking led far away from any charity as well as from any humanity” (JPCM, 147).¹¹⁰ While one may interpret this as an ethical criticism, and Strauss presumably intends it to be so, one can also regard the second part of this claim as a statement or confirmation of Heidegger’s avowed anti-humanist stance. Heidegger claimed that ‘old thinking,’ i.e., philosophy stemming from its (Socratic) Greek beginnings, must be overcome; however, Heidegger also claimed that we did not yet have an adequate understanding of those Greek beginnings, and “with the questioning of traditional philosophy the traditional understanding of the tradition becomes questionable” (JPCM, 147).¹¹¹

Strauss next claims that “[a]t that time [i.e., presumably the time surrounding the publication of *Sein und Zeit*—DT] Heidegger expressed his thought about revelation by silence or deed rather than speech” (JPCM, 148). This statement seems to be flatly contradicted by the content of much of Heidegger’s writings from that time.¹¹² However, much depends on what Strauss means by ‘deed’ and ‘speech.’ I would claim Strauss to be arguing here that Heidegger did not directly confront the Biblical understanding of revelation at the level required or suggested by Strauss, and instead posited his new thinking as absolutely ‘this-worldly,’ or, put another way, absolutely atheistic. Heidegger’s

¹¹⁰ Strauss also emphasizes the lack of the possibility of charity in Heidegger’s thinking in “Kurt Riezler,” WIPP, 260.

¹¹¹ Strauss insinuates his dependence on Heideggerian *Destruktion* for a fresh approach to the tradition of philosophy.

¹¹² For example, in “Phenomenology and Theology,” a lecture from 1927, Heidegger says that “faith, as a specific possibility of existence, is in its innermost core the mortal enemy [*Todfeind*] of the form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy” (PM, 53; GA 9, 66). A possible Heideggerian response to Strauss’s accusations will be elaborated in chapter 2 of this thesis.

‘silence’ concerning the possibility of wisdom from revelation stems from the fact that, for Strauss, religion cannot be understood properly if it is grasped in accordance with the structure of *Sein und Zeit*.¹¹³ For Heidegger, claims Strauss, “there is no security, no happy ending, no divine shepherd, hope is replaced by thinking” (JPCM, 149), i.e., the eschatology of the Bible is disallowed from the outset, and expectant faith in redemption is replaced by Heidegger’s proper form of anticipatory behaviour, i.e., thought as he understands it (*Denken*). Here we can see Strauss as finally addressing the later thought of Heidegger, and linking that thought even more than before to a religious way of human existence.

In a religious context or understanding, revelation comes as a particular experience, a call from without to act in accordance with the divinely-revealed order. For Heidegger, claims Strauss, “[e]very assertion about the absolute experience which says more than that what is experienced is the Presence or the Call, is not the experiencer, is not flesh and blood, is the wholly other, is death or nothingness, is an ‘image’ or interpretation; that any one interpretation is the simply true interpretation is not known but ‘merely believed’” (JPCM, 149-150). This passage indicates that Heidegger does not allow for the possibility of one true revelation of the order of the whole or what is. This is because, as the section of *Sein und Zeit* referenced in Strauss’s footnote (JPCM, 174 n. 23) indicates, for Heidegger the call of conscience is a call from Dasein itself, and as a result it is “an attestation of Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-being” (BT, 324; SZ, 279). As Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-being is the cessation of Dasein, or death, Dasein’s death in a sense determines or conditions the call. Here we see Strauss’s justification of his startling

¹¹³ Some commentators have argued that there *is* room for God in the structure of the existential analytic of Dasein, e.g. Rudolph Bultmann, whom John Caputo discusses in *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 173.

formulation expressed elsewhere: for Heidegger, “God is death” (“Reason and Revelation,” a lecture appended to Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 167). God is essentially nothingness, as the cessation of Dasein is essentially nothingness, but it is this nothingness which, if recognized properly, allows for the possibility of authentic decisions. Strauss makes reference here to Carl Ferdinand Meyer’s 1890 novel *The Tempting of Pescara*. In the novel, the character Pescara’s unwavering will, attacked from all sides by those who would dissuade him or use him for their own ends, receives its strength from the fact that Pescara considers death to have made him incorruptible. Strauss thus draws a parallel between the novel and Heidegger’s thought; we need only think of anticipatory resoluteness and its dependence on the recognition of death to see that the parallel is plausible.¹¹⁴

Strauss next states that Heidegger follows Nietzsche, who, according to Strauss, claimed that to reject the Biblical God requires the rejection of Biblical morality, and that “mercy, compassion, egalitarianism, brotherly love or altruism must give way to cruelty and its kin” (JPCM, 150). It is not clear whether *Sein und Zeit* endorses cruelty, but certainly it endorses a hard way of living, for to be authentic requires one to reject what ‘they’ do, i.e., the beliefs and evaluative position of *das Man*.¹¹⁵ Regardless, Strauss also notes Nietzsche’s claim that Biblical morality will persist in a new form: “Biblical morality

¹¹⁴ Some passages from Meyer’s novel are illustrative: “[b]ut I will be frank with you: Italy appeals in vain and wastes its pains. I have long foreseen this temptation; I saw it coming, gathering to a head like a rolling billow; and I have not wavered, not for an instant, not in my lightest thought. For in truth, I have no choice, I am not my own; I stand outside, apart.—Vittoria was alarmed.—‘How? Are you not human? Are you a spirit and not flesh and blood? Do you not tread the earth you move on?’—‘My guardian God,’ he replied calmly, ‘has stilled the storm that tossed about my helm;’” and later, at the climax of the novel, “‘what if it were a dead man whom we have been trying to tempt?’” (Meyer, *The Temptation of Pescara*, trans. Clara Bell (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 135 and 180). There are also connections between Strauss’s discussion here and his claim, noted earlier in this section, that Heidegger’s thinking emphasizes the negative aspects of human existence at the expense of the positive ones. For further discussion of Strauss’s understanding of the relation between Heidegger and Meyer, see Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 45-51.

¹¹⁵ I will examine Heidegger’s analyses of *das Man* and *die Eigentlichkeit* in chapter 2 of this thesis.

will remain at work in the morality of the overman” or “the philosophy of the future” (JPCM, 151).¹¹⁶ This is the reason why Strauss claims the following: “the fundamental awareness characteristic of new thinking is a secularized version of the Biblical faith as interpreted by Christian theology,” and “the understanding of man which [Heidegger] opposes to the Greek understanding of man as the rational animal is, as he emphasizes, primarily the Biblical understanding of man as created in the image of God” (JPCM, 151). As was mentioned above, Heidegger “interprets human life in the light of ‘being toward death,’ ‘anguish,’ ‘conscience,’ and ‘guilt’; in this most important respect, he is much more Christian than Nietzsche” (JPCM, 151).¹¹⁷ To conclude this discussion of the “Preface,” Strauss claims that Heidegger has failed to extricate himself from the categories of Biblical morality, and this claim rests on the fact that for Strauss there are only two sources on which to base one’s way of living, namely reason or revelation, and Heidegger has not sufficiently recognized this situation. For Strauss, the fact that belief in revelation is based on a decision, or an ‘act of will,’ fundamentally distinguishes it from philosophy, whose truths are supposed to be evident and independent of belief in them. Heidegger’s thought “cannot deceive one about the fact that its basis is an act of will, of belief, and, being based on belief, is fatal to any philosophy” (JPCM, 172).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Cf. Carl Schmitt’s statement concerning contemporary politics as based upon “secularized theological concepts” (*Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, George Schwab, trans. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 36).

¹¹⁷ Strauss’s footnote to this comment provides references to *Sein und Zeit* (48-49, 190 n.1, 229-230, 249 n.1, German pagination), each of which discuss theological understandings of the concepts which Heidegger is examining at the respective point in the text. While Heidegger always takes care in *Sein und Zeit* to distinguish his ontological categories from those of religious, specifically Christian, faith, it is at least possible, due to the fact that the categories Strauss identifies are absolutely critical for Heidegger’s conception of Dasein, that Heidegger had not freed himself completely from a religious understanding of human existence. I will examine this issue further in chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹¹⁸ Strauss here repeats verbatim the criticism he made more than three decades earlier in *Philosophie und Gesetz* concerning atheism stemming from ‘probity’ (JPCM, 172), and in doing so he clarifies that it was indeed Heidegger against whom Strauss argued in the earlier text. However, the passage just quoted was added by Strauss to the “Preface,” and thus constitutes a reinterpretation of his earlier position. Cf. PL, 38; GS

Strauss continued to argue against the radical historicist even in the last years of his life, during which he was constantly plagued by ill health. The texts from this period, however, also reflected Strauss's preoccupation with Socrates, one which finally resulted in several books explicitly on the theme published in Strauss's last years and posthumously.¹¹⁹ The lecture which I will now examine, "The Problem of Socrates," delivered in 1970 and recently published with "Existentialism" as "Two Lectures by Leo Strauss,"¹²⁰ evinces this preoccupation. While only a small section of it focuses on Heidegger, it will serve to illuminate other features of Strauss's overall critique.¹²¹ Here as before, Strauss understands Heidegger's thinking to be a continuation of that of Nietzsche, specifically Nietzsche's attack on Socrates which means Nietzsche's attack on reason *tout court*. Nietzsche claims reason to be "based on a prejudice, and the most *dangerous* of all prejudices...[i]n other words, reason, which waxes so easily and so highly indignant about the demanded sacrifice of the intellect, rests *itself* on the sacrifice of the intellect" ("The Problem of Socrates," 323-324, Strauss's emphasis).¹²² Heidegger, claims Strauss, preserves Nietzsche's critique of Socratic rationalism, but at the same time denies the idea of eternity, which in turn means that "there is no way in which thought can transcend time, can transcend

2, 26 with the paragraph ending with the passage just quoted from the "Preface." At the time of *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Strauss had not yet clarified the origin of the fundamental tension between reason and revelation; by the time of the writing of the "Preface," he had evidently done so. Janssens claims this important addition to indicate that "[i]n its ultimate form, modern philosophy reveals its foundation in an act of belief, and thereby it disqualifies itself as unbelieving science or philosophy" (*Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 94). Velkley connects the problem of 'belief or will as the basis of a philosophical position' to Strauss's interpretation of radical historicism in NRH, 26-27 (Velkley, "On the Roots of Rationalism," 257).

¹¹⁹ This is not to say that Socrates and Socratic conception of philosophy was not Strauss's lifelong topic of concern. Rather, I wish to emphasize that it was only at the end of his life that he finally began to publish extended treatises on the problem of Socrates, as found Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Plato.

¹²⁰ The last three paragraphs of the third chapter of RCPR were taken from this lecture; see my discussion of that earlier publication in n. 61 above.

¹²¹ I will only examine those aspects of this lecture that I understand as differing from or adding to the main ideas of "Existentialism" which make reference to Heidegger.

¹²² Strauss makes the same point concerning Max Weber in NRH, 76. This idea is also echoed in Strauss's "Preface" to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, described above.

History...[and thus] all thought *belongs* radically to an epoch, a culture, a folk” (“The Problem of Socrates,” 324-325, Strauss’s emphasis).¹²³ Strauss is stating much the same thing as he did in his discussion of radical historicism in *Natural Right and History*.¹²⁴

Strauss makes an important remark here, also echoed in *Natural Right and History*:

modern history...deals with *all* human activities and thoughts, with the whole of [what is called] ‘culture.’ There is no ‘culture’ in [Greek] thought...but there are...[opinions,] *doxai*, especially about the highest (the gods); these [opinions] are therefore the highest in what we would call a ‘culture’...Their objects have the cognitive status of...things owing their being to being *held*, frozen results of abortive reasonings which are declared to be sacred. They are...the ceilings of caves. (“The Problem of Socrates,” 326, Strauss’s emphasis, editor’s insertions)¹²⁵

Hence, we can conclude that Strauss considered the modern fixation on history to be, in terms of ancient or Platonic thought, a fixation on the political ‘first position’ of human beings which is always temporally conditioned and impermanent, and hence on that which is distinguished from philosophy’s proper objects of contemplation, the eternal or permanent things.¹²⁶ For Strauss, Heidegger’s choice as to which things are first for

¹²³ “In ostensibly transcending both the Platonic (objective) and Cartesian (subjective) dimensions of Husserl’s thought, Heidegger excluded eternity altogether from the horizon of human experience. Consequently, the identification of the phenomenon with Being was for Heidegger simply the assertion of a more radical version of historicism than had hitherto been formulated” (Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 36). Rosen thus interprets Heidegger’s self-understanding as anti-historicist; however, as Heidegger has pointed out in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s anti-metaphysics, a contrary position continues to be determined by that against which it reacts. If this is the case, Heidegger’s exclusion of eternity can be seen as the most radical *expression* of historicism, rather than a cure for it.

¹²⁴ However, Strauss also notes here that the rise of the historical consciousness is the reason why there even is a contemporary ‘problem of Socrates.’ Strauss again indicates why Heidegger ‘compels one to reflect’ on the problems of nature and natural right.

¹²⁵ Cf. NRH, 12.

¹²⁶ Ward states that “[w]hile Strauss turns to historical studies or to historical texts, he does not turn to history as a dimension of reality. Unlike Heidegger, Strauss cannot grant this status to history because it makes unintelligible his aim of understanding past thinkers as they understood themselves” (“Political Philosophy and History,” 293). This interpretation attempts to save Strauss from any association with a historicist position. However, if the “fundamental alternatives” to the “fundamental problems” are “coeval with human thought” (NRH, 32) or “in principle, coeval with human thought” (NRH, 35), history must be a dimension of reality in the sense that particular historical situations provide answers to the fundamental problems. The historical, understood in the Socratic sense to be the political, situation must be examined as the source of

philosophical examination disallows Socratic philosophy, and as such, Heidegger's thinking remains trapped in the 'cave beneath the cave,' which, as in the cave, remains in the realm of convention and unable to access the realm of nature.

According to Heidegger, thinkers previous to him only thought of beings (*Seiendes*) and not being itself (*Sein*). "*Sein*," according to Heidegger, "cannot be explained by *Seiendes*" ("The Problem of Socrates," 328).¹²⁷ *Sein* cannot be understood in reference to *Seiendes*, because, as Heidegger has shown, the meaning of *Sein* itself conditions any understanding we have of *Seiendes*. This failure of previous thinkers to consider the meaning of *Sein* was not their fault, though, as "*Sein*... 'gives' or 'sends' in different epochs a different understanding of *Sein*, and therewith of 'everything'...[and hence] this failure was due, not to any negligence of theirs, but to *Sein* itself" ("The Problem of Socrates," 328).¹²⁸

The *Sein* of human beings is the most important question to investigate. According to the Strauss, for the earlier Heidegger, "man is project: everyone is what (or rather who) he is by virtue of the exercise of his freedom...But man is [also] a project which is thrown somewhere (*geworfener Entwurf*)" ("The Problem of Socrates," 328, Strauss's emphasis). Strauss also notes that "the ground of all beings...is *Sein*—this ground of grounds is coeval with man and therefore also not eternal or sempiternal" ("The Problem of Socrates," 329). This means that the meaning of *Sein* is tied to the existence of human beings in history, and

truth, for not to do so "would amount to abandoning the most important access to reality which we have, or the most important vestiges of the truth which are within our reach" (NRH, 124).

¹²⁷ In this passage and the following, I have italicized German terms for the sake of formatting; the italics do not exist in the original text.

¹²⁸ This passage alludes to Heidegger's claim that the greatest philosophers somehow had 'Being speaking through them,' evinced by his claim that there is an 'unsaid' element in a particular thinker's work ("the 'doctrine' of a thinker is the unsaid in what is said by the thinker, that to which man is exposed [*ausgesetzt*] so that he might expend himself [*sich verschwende*] on it" (Heidegger, "Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit," GA 9, 203, my translation)). This notion, at first glance similar to Strauss's notion of esoteric writing, will be discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

thus the meaning of *Sein* is historical. “If we try to understand anything radically,” Heidegger is purported to claim, “we come up against facticity, irreducible facticity” (“The Problem of Socrates,” 329). Existence precedes essence. Elaborating further, Strauss notes the similarity between Heidegger’s thinking and a religious perspective, specifically on the origin of *Sein* and human beings. According to Strauss, one can attribute to Heidegger the claim that

ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit [out of nothing every being as being comes out]. This could remind one of the biblical doctrine of creation [out of nothing]. But Heidegger has no place for the Creator-God. (“The Problem of Socrates,” 329, editor’s translation and additions)

Strauss thus concludes that “Heidegger seems to have succeeded in getting rid of *phusis*¹²⁹ without having left open a back door to a thing-in-itself and without being in need of a philosophy of nature (Hegel)...at the price of the unintelligibility of *Sein*” (“The Problem of Socrates,” 330).¹³⁰ Heidegger thus sidesteps the problems which arise from modern philosophy’s revolutionary thinkers, Kant and Hegel, and thereby effectively eliminates the possibility of a rational understanding of nature as permanent (in contradistinction to convention as temporal). *Sein* is unintelligible because it cannot be understood rationally, due to its fluctuating character and (Socratic) reason’s purported inability to take this flux into account. As was mentioned in the previous discussion on “Existentialism,” it is Heidegger’s amalgamation of the rational and revelatory sources of knowledge of being that leads, according to Strauss, to the unintelligibility of *Sein*. Hence, Heidegger’s thought is for Strauss the paradigmatic example of a philosophical position resulting from the belief

¹²⁹ Strauss understands *phusis* to refer to the natural structure and articulation of the whole, as distinguished from the conventional articulation, and thus somewhat differently from the Heideggerian sense of the process or way in which natural beings reveal themselves, i.e., *Sein* itself. The relation between Strauss’s and Heidegger’s differing conceptions of nature will be elaborated in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹³⁰ This statement may be alluding to Heidegger’s essay, “What is Metaphysics?,” which discusses the relation between *das Sein* and *das Nichts*.

in the end of reason and the commencement of the crisis of the West. Strauss notes his reason for discussing Heidegger in a lecture entitled “The Problem of Socrates:”

[t]his lecture consists of two heterogeneous parts—they are held together apparently only by the title ‘The problem of Socrates,’ which is necessarily ambiguous: the problem of Socrates is philosophic and it is historical. The *distinction* between philosophic and historical cannot be avoided, but the distinction is not total *separation*: one cannot study the philosophic problem without having made up one’s mind on the historical problem, and one cannot study the historical problem without having made up one’s mind implicitly on the philosophic problem. (“The Problem of Socrates,” 335)

Strauss’s use of the word ‘implicitly’ refers back to his remark concerning Heidegger’s notion that the solution to the problem of historicism “cannot lie in a return to the supra-temporal or eternal but only in something historical” (“The Problem of Socrates,” 330). Heidegger, then, has made up his mind implicitly concerning the philosophical problem, namely that philosophy’s Socratic attempt to discover eternal truth is considered to be quixotic from the start. In doing so, as Strauss has repeatedly stated, Heidegger is quintessentially modern due to his belief in the idea of progress from past thinkers. There is no way back to the pre-modern presupposition of eternal truth of nature as possible to discover. Conversely, this presupposition remains an open question for Strauss, indeed a necessary one for philosophy as Strauss understands it to continue.

Strauss expresses his contention that Heidegger is the most radical modern in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” originally published in 1971 and reprinted in Strauss’s posthumous anthology, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*.¹³¹ Again, we see by the title of the book in which we find this essay that he

¹³¹ The placement of this essay as the first of the book is, in accordance with Strauss’s own ideas concerning esoteric writing and interpretation, critically important. I believe that it is placed here to indicate the preliminary position of contemporary philosophy before its excursion out of ‘the cave beneath the cave,’ which must be accomplished in order to begin to philosophize in the way Strauss understands it. As I have shown above, Strauss has upheld the necessity of historical studies as a propaedeutic to philosophizing since the 1930s. I will examine Strauss’s conception of esoteric writing in detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

somehow wishes to engage radical historicism in light of the thought of Plato, or the style of philosophizing originated in that thought. In this text, Strauss discusses Heidegger's thinking as a response to that of Husserl, Heidegger's phenomenological predecessor and teacher. Previous to this discussion, however, Strauss outlines his understanding of Heidegger's political philosophy. For Strauss, "[t]here is no room for political philosophy in Heidegger's work, and this may well be due to the fact that the room in question is occupied by gods or the gods [*sic*]" (SPPP, 30). Here again we see Strauss's attribution to Heidegger of a quasi-religious or revelatory philosophical position.¹³² For Heidegger, the bases of particular political orders are revealed to the thinker in particular historical moments, and therefore, taking into account Strauss's understanding of the realm of history as conventional and hence political, "History [*sic*] is not a rational process" (SPPP, 30).¹³³ This notion, says Strauss, means that Heidegger believed that he understood those philosophers who came before him better than they understood themselves, as they did not know or acknowledge the fundamentally irrational basis of human existence, or the "fundamental abyss" (SPPP, 30).

Continuing, Strauss understands Heidegger to be a critic of Husserl, who himself was a critic of the Marburg Neo-Kantian school characterized by such thinkers as Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, and in which Strauss was trained. Husserl, claims Strauss, believed the Neo-Kantians 'to have begun with the roof,' as for Husserl "all philosophic understanding must start from our common understanding of the world as sensibly perceived prior to all theorizing" (SPPP, 31). Husserl thus believed the Neo-Kantians not to have adequately grounded their philosophical speculations in actual lived perception, the

¹³² Cf. Strauss's remark concerning "incipient *mythoi*" in WIPP, 246.

¹³³ Cf. Heidegger's discussion of the origin and meaning of *pōl ij*, IM, 152-153; GA 40, 161-162.

essence of which Husserl believed to be discoverable through phenomenological analysis. Strauss then understands Heidegger as a radicalization of Husserl¹³⁴: “the primary theme is not the object of perception but the full thing as experienced as part of the individual human context, the individual world to which it belongs” (SPPP, 31).¹³⁵ As a consequence of this statement and Heidegger’s understanding of each individual world as radically historical, “one can no longer speak of our ‘natural’ understanding of the world; every understanding of the world is historical” (SPPP, 31). A natural understanding, the goal of all pre-historicist philosophy, is impossible for Heidegger; for Strauss, the ‘second cave’ disallows it.

Strauss next elaborates his understanding of Heidegger’s philosophy of history, linking it to those of Marx and Nietzsche, who both had ‘eschatological’ conceptions of history. For Heidegger, says Strauss, “the moment at which the final insight is arriving,” the moment of the discovery of the radical historicity of all human thought and experience, “opens the eschatological prospect” (SPPP, 33). However, this prospect is fraught with danger, according to Heidegger, and philosophy can only have “the task of contributing toward the recovery or return of *Bodenständigkeit* [Strauss’s translation: ‘rootedness in the soil’] or rather preparing an entirely novel kind of *Bodenständigkeit*: a *Bodenständigkeit*

¹³⁴ Ian Loadman claims this to be an incorrect reading of Heidegger: “[o]n Strauss’s Husserlian reading of *Being and Time* it makes sense, once one has rejected the pure transcendental form of the understanding, to raise the question of whether philosophy is not thereby relativized to its social or cultural setting. This way of reading *Being and Time* fails, however, to give enough weight to the centrality of the connection between historicity and the destruction of the history of ontology that Heidegger projected as Part II of the book” (“Historical Sickness: Strauss and Heidegger,” unpublished conference paper, 2008, 10). This being said, one is uncertain what to make of Heidegger’s own admission of dependence on Husserlian phenomenological method as he understands it in the introduction to *Sein und Zeit*. As well, Strauss holds Heidegger to be the most radical expression of modernity, thereby drawing together and pushing to their limit the various tendencies of modern thought, the most notable of which being the attempt to make humanity ‘master of its fate.’ This second point indicates that Strauss does not view Heidegger as a mere epigone of Husserl.

¹³⁵ At this point in the text, Strauss makes explicit reference to *SZ*, section 21 (98-99), which argues against the Cartesian notion of the basis of all things as material, *res extensia*, which then has evaluative characteristics somehow ‘added’ to it.

beyond the most extreme *Bodenlosigkeit*, a being at home beyond the most extreme homelessness” (SPPP, 33).¹³⁶ With the complete loss of a natural basis for human existence, a complete loss of home, Heidegger’s thinking attempts to forge or construct a new abode for human beings, one seemingly ‘hovering over the abyss.’¹³⁷

Again, Strauss notes the impossibility of political philosophy in connection with this position. It is impossible to discover the best possible regime for human beings, if the nature of those beings, and hence the political system most in accordance with that nature, is impossible to discover. Heidegger’s thinking is closely associated with irrationalism’s appearance in political life; Strauss, in a perhaps inflammatory comment, says that “Heidegger learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man” (SPPP, 34). Light is shed on this controversial claim by considering Strauss’s remarks in the Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*:

[L]iberated from the religious delusion, awakened to the sober awareness of his real situation, taught by bad experiences that he is threatened by a stingy, hostile nature, man recognizes as his sole salvation and duty, not so much ‘to cultivate his garden’ as in the first place to plant a garden by making himself the master and owner of nature. But this whole enterprise requires, above all, political action, revolution, a life and death struggle.” (JPCM, 171)

The ultimate or extreme political result of ‘making humanity absolute master of its fate’ is, for Strauss, exemplified in Heidegger’s choice for National Socialism, and its failure is

¹³⁶ Heidegger considers both the danger and the future possibility to be coinstantiated; see his analysis in “The Question Concerning Technology” of the following fragment of Hölderlin’s poem: “Denn wo der Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch” (QT, 28; GA 7, 29).

¹³⁷ Pippin claims correctly that “the radically sceptical, incomplete, or zetetic character of Strauss’s version of Socraticism is what promotes a kind of homelessness potentially subversive in contexts where steadfast loyalty, faith, and dedication are the required virtues” (“The Modern World of Leo Strauss,” in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 144 n. 11). However, it is precisely the second aspect of Strauss’s twofold understanding of political philosophy, i.e., the idea that philosophy must be politically responsible both for philosophy’s and political life’s sake, that allows Strauss to avoid the accusation of the promotion of ‘homelessness.’ Philosophers must always recognize their dependence on the political situation that gives them a home, for the sake of both protection from the indifferent universe, and as a source of the matters upon which dialectical reasoning deliberates, the opinions which are “soiled fragments of the pure truth” (NRH, 124). I will examine this in further detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

ultimately exemplified in Heidegger's fleeing from a concrete philosophically-determined relation to politics and adopting a position of reverential waiting for the god to come.¹³⁸ Concluding his discussion of Heidegger in this essay, Strauss remarks that such a position can be considered to hold "fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than from philosophers" (SPPP, 34). We see Strauss claiming Heidegger to be a prophet, or a position entailing the combination of prophet and philosopher, which entails for Strauss the erroneous collapsing together of reason and revelation, the only two possible sources of wisdom which are mutually opposed.

The final text I will examine in this section is "The Three Waves of Modernity," published posthumously in 1975.¹³⁹ This text does not address Heidegger directly, but I believe that many of the claims made at the end of the essay allude to Heideggerian thinking. Strauss begins the essay by a brief preamble concerning the 'crisis of modernity,' which he characterizes by "the fact...that modern western man no longer knows what he wants—that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong" ("The Three Waves of Modernity," 81). Political philosophy, as Strauss understands it, has become impossible because of this crisis, in the sense that the quest for the best political order is now viewed as "perhaps a noble dream" ("The Three Waves of Modernity," 81). In a passage which reminds us of Strauss's analysis of Heidegger, Strauss says that this view has arisen because

¹³⁸ In relation to Strauss's claim concerning the 'lesson of 1933,' Zuckert remarks that "unlike previous philosophers of history, [Heidegger] does not call for any political action to promote the establishment of a world culture, much less some form of worldwide rule. The attempt not merely to achieve worldwide domination, but to conquer or impose man's will on nature as a whole led not to human supremacy and unqualified freedom, but to the destruction of everything that had been called distinctively human" (*Postmodern Platos*, 172). Cf. also Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*, 41-42. There is a connection here to Strauss's claim concerning Heidegger as "the only man who has an inkling of the dimensions of the problem of a world society" ("Existentialism," 317); see my discussion of this passage above.

¹³⁹ In *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

the categories of theoretical understanding imply, somehow, principles of evaluation; but those principles of evaluation together with the categories of understanding are historically variable; they change from epoch to epoch; hence it is impossible to answer the question of the right and wrong or of the best social order in a universally valid manner, in a manner valid for all historical epochs, as political philosophy requires. (“The Three Waves of Modernity,” 82)

In the first part of this passage, we see Strauss making a very Heideggerian claim, namely that theoretical understanding, e.g., scientific understanding, is itself an evaluative claim—there is no way to distinguish between facts and values. This is because science is, for Heidegger, founded on the more originary experience of Dasein as in-the-world which itself has an evaluative component. At the same time, while not using the same terms as Heidegger, Strauss also claims that human existence is from the start evaluative. We are born into the cave of opinion, and this situation determines all pretheoretical notions concerning right and wrong.¹⁴⁰

The essay as a whole shows that Strauss is not just an unreflective ‘nonhistoricist.’¹⁴¹ The ‘three waves,’ each a radicalization of the consequences of the previous one, have produced the current philosophical situation; we can say that Strauss believes our situation, our philosophical ‘horizon,’ to be determined by this inexorable process of modern thought.¹⁴² Strauss believes Heidegger to be the most radical thinker of the third wave, or, the ‘final modern.’ For Strauss, the third ‘wave’ was initiated by

¹⁴⁰ I will elaborate this relation in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁴¹ Nathan Tarcov discusses the ambiguities present in Strauss’s relation to historicism in “Philosophy and History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss,” *Polity*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Autumn 1983), 5-29.

¹⁴² Strauss’s “thesis of radical historicism: “[a]ll understanding, all knowledge, however limited and ‘scientific,’ presupposes a frame of reference; it presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which *all understanding and knowing take place*” (NRH, 26, my emphasis). Compare this with Strauss’s claim in the chapter on ‘Classical Natural Right:’ “[a]ll knowledge, however limited or ‘scientific,’ presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which *knowledge is possible*” (NRH, 125, my emphasis). The slight difference in wording indicates Strauss’s acknowledgement of Heidegger’s importance in drawing philosophical attention to the everyday, and also Strauss’s criticism of Heidegger as misunderstanding the philosophical importance of the everyday, in the sense that, for Strauss, it is the way by which to grasp transhistorical truth. I examine this further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Nietzsche, who responded to the second wave initiated by Rousseau, who in turn responded to the first wave initiated by Machiavelli. Thus, in an important sense, Strauss considers Heidegger to be the ultimate epigone of a process begun by Machiavelli, a process which is a fundamental break with the philosophical approach and investigations which came before.

Strauss says that

the third wave may be described as being constituted by a new understanding of the sentiment of existence: that sentiment is the experience of terror and anguish rather than of harmony and peace, and it is the sentiment of historic existence as necessarily tragic; the human problem is indeed insoluble as a social problem...but there is no escape from the human to nature. (“The Three Waves of Modernity,” 94)

This is, according to Strauss, Nietzsche’s view of the possibility of political philosophy—understood as the attempt to discover the best or natural political order. The result is that “[a]ll ideals are the outcome of human creative acts, of free human projects that form the horizon within which specific cultures were possible; they do not order themselves into a system, and there is no possibility of a genuine synthesis of them” (“The Three Waves of Modernity,” 96). This is, for Strauss, the connection between the third and first waves of modernity: the meaning of the world in which humans exist is a product of those humans’ creative acts, and thus, in accordance with the Machiavellian suggestion, “man will be for the first time master of his fate” (“The Three Waves of Modernity,” 97). Heidegger is understood in the end as a radicalization of the modern tendencies of philosophical thought originating in Machiavelli, and thus for Strauss Heidegger remains a modern. For Strauss, the modern solution to the theologico-political problem leads to the radically modern rejection of reason and subsequent upholding of belief and commitment as central to philosophy, and indeed human action. Humanity becomes master of its fate at the price of utter dependence on that fate for meaning.

We can see that in the end, Strauss viewed Heidegger both as the most radical modern, in contrast to an ancient philosophical position, and also as fundamentally religious, to be contrasted with a position based on reason. Taken together, we see here Strauss's idea that the Heideggerian philosopher is to be understood in direct contrast to the Socratic philosopher. Both the Heideggerian and the Socratic turned their respective philosophical attention to the human things, but for Strauss only the Socratic can see the human things for what they are, i.e., always already determined by political life. In focusing more directly on Socrates, Strauss made the differences between his and Heidegger's respective positions, as well as, it must be noted, the similarities between those positions, all the clearer.

1.5 Strauss's Conception and Critique of Heidegger

I will now attempt to draw the above discussion together, in order to pin down Strauss's critique of Heidegger from the multiplicity of sources quoted above. From the above quoted texts, I infer that for Strauss, there are four main lines of critique of Heidegger's position. First, Strauss claims that Heidegger's analysis is itself based on the notion that we have arrived at an absolute moment in history, for it is only now that we recognize the inherent historicity of human existence. However, this notion belies the lack of reflection on the historicity of that claim itself. That is, the consistent Heideggerian must allow for the possibility that a new, non-historicist understanding of human existence may indeed appear in the future. Second, Heidegger's analysis of the structure of Dasein identifies *Angst*, the reaction to the recognition of the historicity of human existence, to be the fundamental human experience. This claim, according to Strauss, has not been

adequately investigated and has merely been accepted as fact. Strauss wishes to show that this claim is a modern commonplace not shared by ancient philosophy. Third, Heidegger's philosophical position is in fact a secularized theological position, and the main categories of *Sein und Zeit* are themselves based upon aspects of religious existence. This has occurred because, according to Strauss, Heidegger has insufficiently understood the tension between reason and revelation as two sources of knowledge for human beings. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Strauss considers Heidegger to replace an investigation of nature or the nature of the whole with an investigation of the meaning of *Sein*. For Heidegger, the problems of political philosophy are subsumed by those of ontology. Such an investigation does not take into account the situation of human beings as human, namely that human beings are enmeshed within or thrown into a structure understood, at least at first, to be essentially determined by politics or convention. Strauss posits the proper political understanding of the nature of that structure, as well as the attempt to understand the natural structure on which it subtends, as the fundamental or primary goal of philosophy. *Natural Right and History*, as well as perhaps all of his other writings, are intended as an oppositional response to *Sein und Zeit* and the position which it, and Heidegger's later writings, are claimed to espouse, that of radical historicism. I will now investigate each of these lines of critique in greater detail, attempting at the same time to indicate the interrelation of all of them.

In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss claims that the radical historicist position entails the idea that we have arrived at an absolute moment in history, a moment from which we can know something essential about our existence to which earlier eras had no access. For the radical historicist, our era is the 'source' of or basis for the idea, and as such it is the final moment in the history of philosophy: the question as to the possibility of

philosophical knowledge or knowledge of the whole has been answered once and for all, and the answer is the denial of that possibility. The radical historicist thought of our era, as Strauss says in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” points toward this eschatological end of philosophical investigation, and for Heidegger, what is to come after (*Denken*). However, claims Strauss in “Existentialism,” there is a problem with this idea, namely that it does not take into account its own historicity. If the source of or basis for this idea is our era, if our era is the privileged moment in the history of humanity that provides an insight into the historical aspect of human existence as fundamental, a consistent radical historicist position must allow for other eras to give or be the source of other ideas concerning the historical character of human existence. The radical historicist must allow for the possibility that other eras may also provide such an insight, and that this possible insight may indicate historicism to be an error. Hence, in “Relativism,” Strauss notes the latent quasi-transcendental, or quasi-Kantian, aspect of the analytics of Dasein in *Sein und Zeit*. It is Heidegger’s recognition of this, claims Strauss in “Existentialism,” which leads to his *Kehre* to the history of *Sein* and subsequent abandonment of a Dasein-centric model of philosophical investigation. However, this, for Strauss, does not solve the problem of self-reference. Strauss claims, in *Natural Right and History*, that the radical historicist position, and its holding of the historical aspect of human existence as fundamental, are themselves based on a questionable understanding of that aspect, one which according to Strauss was already taken into consideration by ancient philosophy. Strauss also argues that the problem of historicism is itself only a problem for modern, as opposed to ancient, philosophy, and Heidegger’s radical historicism, as radically modern, falls prey to the same pitfalls as the thought of those moderns who came before him. In this way Strauss points to what he considers to be one of the most important differences

between ancient and modern philosophy, and thereby contributes to the resurrection of what he calls the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. For Strauss, as he states in *Natural Right and History*, the problem of natural right or nature, as opposed to history, is a problem due to the crisis of modern natural right; the investigation of the ancient conception of natural right, and with it the radical reformulation, following ancient philosophy, of the questions concerning human existence could lead to a solution to the problem of the historicity of radical historicism.

Closely tied to this line of critique is the one which addresses the problematic status of what historicism considers to be the basic or fundamental human experience from which meaning is derived. What Strauss, in *Natural Right and History*, calls ‘the experience of history,’ or the experience of the radical dependence of all evaluative standards on the particular historical situation in which one finds oneself, was never itself examined as to its suitability as a basis for the edifice of radical historicism. In fact, Strauss says that this experience of history is nothing more, although also nothing less, than the experience of ‘the cave.’ It is the transition to radical historicism, the transition to existentialist or Heideggerian thought, that provides the opportunity to question this dependence on the experience of history through the recognition of the fact that acknowledgement of such an experience solves the problem of the specifically modern conception of philosophy. Ancient philosophy, according to Strauss, views and takes into account the experience of history in a different way, sidestepping the problem of closure to the possibility of permanently answering philosophical questions. In “Existentialism,” Strauss similarly indicates that an existentialist position considers *Angst* to be the fundamental human experience, that which indicates the proper way to understand meaningful human choice. We experience *Angst*, according to Strauss, when we experience the groundless character of

our decisions due to our acknowledgement of the ungrounded character of all decisions, namely that decisions ultimately can only find a basis in the historical situation of the decider. Again, Strauss indicates the problematic character of *Angst* being considered as the basic human experience. If we view *Angst* as the response to the acknowledgement of relativism, as Strauss says we should, *Angst* is a response to the acknowledgement of the radically historical character of human existence. If this is the basis of *Angst*, then the problem with grounding philosophical investigation on a tenuous basis, much like the experience of history being the basis for acquiring knowledge mentioned above, applies here too. As Strauss implies in “The Three Waves of Modernity,” the reinterpretation of the experience of *Angst*, i.e., the “sentiment of historical existence as necessarily tragic” being the basic experience upon which to build philosophical investigations, is itself a feature of modern philosophy. According to Strauss, ancient philosophy seemingly provides a way out of the problematic situation.

The third line of critique differs from the first two, although there are some connections between them which I will investigate below. The third line, simply put, is that according to Strauss, Heidegger’s thinking has a religious character. Due to Heidegger’s thinking purported to be a hybrid of reason and revelation, characterized by ‘philosophizing religiously,’ Heidegger has collapsed what Strauss understands as the absolute distinction between philosophy and revelation as sources of knowledge about the whole. In “Existentialism,” Strauss notes that philosophers following Nietzsche, or philosophers of the future, will be concerned with the holy. However, the character of the holy will be radically atheistic, and hence the philosophers of the future will have as the task of thinking the preparation for the gods-to-come. Strauss indicates Heidegger’s inclusion in this category of ‘philosophers of the future’ by stating the Heidegger’s understanding of being

can be described as “a synthesis of the Platonic ideas and the biblical God.” Heidegger attempts to overcome the dialectical relation between reason and revelation by making philosophy religious. This statement can be clarified when one examines the Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*. There, Strauss notes that Heidegger’s thought has a religious character, but hope, a characteristic of religion in general, “is replaced with thinking.” This means that, while Heidegger’s thinking shares an eschatological aspect with religion, the Heideggerian eschatology is deferred into the future. Hope disappears because there is no discernable individual relation to the divine order of the whole, in the way traditionally understood by religious belief. The corresponding task of the present is to prepare for the arrival of the god who may not show itself, or is elusive.

Strauss even goes so far, in both the Preface and “Existentialism,” as to state that the categories of *Sein und Zeit*’s analytic of Dasein are themselves essentially religious or theological. Strauss thus understands Heidegger’s early thought to be a secularized version of Biblical faith, a rationalized version of religion, a synthesis of Plato and the Bible. In “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” Strauss claims that such thinking has no room for political philosophy, and this is because such room “is occupied by gods or the gods.” This means that for Heidegger, the ‘just’ political regime cannot be discovered by human beings, because such an organization will itself depend on a revelation from *Sein*, not on reasoned argument. This is the connection to Strauss’s first and second lines of critique concerning history. The possibility of discovering a political regime in accordance with human nature disappears if human beings are most fundamentally historical. Strauss considers Heidegger to be not original enough as a thinker, which in turn leads Heidegger to attempt to solve the crisis, for Strauss a problem resulting from specifically modern philosophy, with the above-mentioned synthesis, rather than rejecting

modern philosophy. Strauss thus views Heidegger as quintessentially modern, and suggests instead a turn to an ‘ancient’ philosophical approach which holds reason and revelation permanently apart. Strauss’s recognition of the religious character of Heidegger’s thinking shows him to understand Heidegger as the most radical expression of the crisis of modern philosophy, not a solution to it as Heidegger considers himself to be.

The final line of critique cannot be justified through specific textual reference, but rather through a consideration of the overall argument of *Natural Right and History*, Strauss’s most developed response to *Sein und Zeit*. As the comparison of the works’ two respective titles above indicated, Strauss posits nature, or the whole, and the understanding of it as the primary theme of philosophical investigation, not *Sein* and our understanding of it as Heidegger would claim. This then leads Strauss to reconsider the history of philosophy as a series of explanations of the natural, or prephilosophic, world, which contrasts with Heidegger’s understanding of the history of philosophy as a series of investigations, explicit or not, into the meaning of *Sein*. As the prephilosophic world is, for Strauss, fundamentally the world of opinion and hence moral/political in character, political philosophy in the Socratic sense must be first philosophy. For Heidegger, by contrast, the prephilosophic world is the world of things which we use in the context of our projects, which in turn are conditioned by the historical situation in which we find ourselves. As the historical situation in which we find ourselves gives us the meaning of *Sein* for that situation, ontology must be first philosophy. However, Strauss understands the history of philosophy in a different way due to his differing conception of what philosophy most fundamentally is. For Strauss, there is a rupture between ancient and modern philosophy. Modern philosophy, beginning with Machiavelli, attempted to make human beings ‘the master of their fate,’ different from ancient philosophy’s understanding of human existence

to be permanently related to or dependent on fate, at least in part. Modern philosophy's attempt was further radicalized through the politicization of philosophy in general during the Enlightenment, and, according to Strauss, Heidegger's thinking is the final expression of this radicalization. For Strauss, Heidegger's thinking makes us absolute masters of our fate by showing the absolutely arbitrary character of that fate; we are masters of it by resolutely willing to accept it. Thus, Heidegger's purported solution to the crisis of modern political philosophy, which Strauss says is at the base of the more general crisis of the West, is itself only the final expression of that crisis. Strauss thus recommends a new understanding of the crisis, and thereby Heidegger's thought in relation to it. *Natural Right and History* responds to *Sein und Zeit* by reconceiving both the task and the history of philosophy in this way.

To conclude, then, Strauss conceives Heidegger to be the most radically modern philosopher, one who collapses the distinction between reason and revelation and thereby combines philosophical and religious thinking. Heidegger thus fails to recognize the fundamental divide between these two sources for knowledge of the whole and, equally as important, two source of knowledge of how to live in accordance with that whole. This then leads Heidegger to fail to recognize his own modern character, and he tacitly accepts many of the modern presuppositions of philosophizing, including the essentially historical character of human existence and that our present moment is the absolute moment in history where human beings may glimpse the essential character of their existence. Strauss thus wrote *Natural Right and History* as one of the first steps toward a response to Heidegger's absolute rejection of the question of the possibility of a natural understanding of the world, and the question of the possibility of discovering a political principle or regime in accordance with that nature, i.e., a principle of natural right. At the same time,

Heidegger's radicality 'compels one to reflect' on the problems inherent in the conflict between the ancients and moderns, reason and revelation, and above all the problem of Socrates, that which can be expressed as 'the theologico-political problem.' We must conclude by stating that while Strauss opposed himself to Heidegger throughout his career, he also constantly indicated his debt to Heidegger both explicitly and implicitly.

1.6 Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I have examined every instance available in Strauss's published works where Heidegger is mentioned, evidently in varying degrees of detail. I have then attempted to determine exactly what Strauss's position vis-à-vis Heidegger is, pointing to four lines of critique which indicate Strauss's reconception of both the task and history of philosophy in light of Heidegger's thinking. I have concluded by attempting to differentiate Strauss's position from that of Heidegger by showing Strauss's reconception of what philosophy is, while at the same time his following at least some of the path for which Heidegger broke the ground. With this reconception and simultaneous following in mind, I will now turn to an analysis Heidegger's works themselves to see if Strauss's critiques are indeed apt, or if they even find purchase in Heidegger's arguments.

2. A Response to Strauss: Heidegger's Texts

One can therefore praise Strauss highly for his extraordinary erudition and philosophical *eros*, as well as for his clarification of the crisis of modernity, while still doubting that he has come to grips with the very thinker whose work he both admires and by whom he has clearly been influenced, positively and negatively:
Heidegger.

—Stanley Rosen, “Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern”

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine Heidegger's writings in light of and in response to the four main lines of critique identified in the last chapter as the primary aspects of Strauss's critique of Heidegger. I will examine the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* predominantly, as I hold that this book is the one to which Strauss intended most of his critique to apply. However, as Strauss also read and reacted to some of Heidegger's later writings, these will be taken into account as well, when necessity demands it.¹

This chapter is divided into four main sections. Each section addresses, from a position drawn from Heidegger's texts, one of Strauss's lines of critique identified in the last chapter: 1) the problem of history and historicity in Heidegger; 2) the problem of what counts as originary experience for Heidegger, and what this means for his thinking; 3) the problem of Heidegger's purported 'religious' thinking, and how he himself conceives of his thought in relation to religion and revelation; 4) the problem of Heidegger's conception of philosophy's task, and its relation and response to the 'crisis of modernity.' I will conclude the chapter with a brief recapitulation of Strauss's position vis-à-vis Heidegger in light of this chapter's analysis. For the most part, I will leave my discussion of the sites of

¹ Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie* must be addressed, as it is considered by some to be Heidegger's second major work after *Sein und Zeit* and the origin of much of his later thought. This poses an interpretive problem: Strauss could not have possibly read this work as it was not published until 1989. However, as Strauss's critiques described in chapter 1 of this thesis are equally applicable to the ideas found in the *Beiträge*, source as it is for much that comes after its composition in the mid-1930s, it is necessary to address the book in this chapter.

confrontation between Heidegger's and Strauss's thought, as well as the subsequent consequences of that confrontation for an understanding of Strauss, for chapter 3 of this thesis. However, in order to put the following analysis in the proper context, the three general themes will be examined in turn in chapter 3: nature, 'first' philosophy, and the approach by which to read a philosophical text. These three themes orient and inform the following.

2.2 Heidegger's Conception of History

Strauss considers Heidegger's position to be the most consistent, and hence archetypal, example of radical historicism.² Strauss understands the result of Heidegger's position to be that all thought is, in the last analysis, radically determined by its time, and that truth which is transhistorical is impossible to discover. This in turn means that for Strauss, Heidegger's position forbids the possibility of the endpoint of philosophical investigation ever being reached. Concurrent with Heidegger's position for Strauss is the consequence that we have reached the final moment of history, one where we recognize the historical character of all thought which came before us. From Heidegger's perspective, philosophy, as Strauss understands Plato and Aristotle to conceive it, seems to have begun without adequately taking this character into account.

It is true that Heidegger understands the history of philosophy from Plato onward to be the history of an error, or an 'errance,' but it behooves us to examine Heidegger's conception of history in further detail in order to see if Strauss's criticism outlined above is indeed apt. In order to narrow the monumental task of conceiving what the earlier

² See Strauss's letter to Löwith ("Correspondence Concerning Modernity," 107; GS 3, 662), discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

Heidegger understands history to be, we must first determine exactly what place Heidegger gives to history in his philosophical project. To begin, this determination necessitates at least some acquaintance with aspects of the ontological-existential analysis of Dasein as presented in *Sein und Zeit*. Dasein is “the manner of Being which this entity—man himself—possesses” (BT, 32; SZ, 11). As such, if Dasein is fundamentally historical, the entity which instantiates such a manner of *Sein* must itself also be fundamentally historical. We will leap over much of Heidegger’s ontological investigations of Dasein in order to arrive directly at paragraph 65 of *Sein und Zeit*, ‘Temporality as the Ontological Meaning of Care.’ Heidegger’s conception of care (*Sorge*) is, as we will see, a useful way into the problem of history. Heidegger has determined *Sorge* previously as “the formally existential totality of Dasein’s ontological structural whole” (BT, 237; SZ, 192), i.e., the complete essential character of Dasein as an existential-ontological way of *Sein*. Heidegger equates Dasein’s *Sein* with *Sorge* because Dasein is the only “being for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue [*Seiendes, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht.*]” (BT, 236; SZ, 191).³ However, this is merely the ontological meaning of Dasein’s *Sein for Dasein*. To explicate the meaning of Dasein’s *Sein as such*, Heidegger repeats his explanation of Dasein’s structures in accordance with the guiding principle of the *temporality* of those structures. It is thus necessary to examine how Dasein’s structures instantiate what

³ Hubert Dreyfus writes that “[i]n a conversation with Heidegger I pointed out that ‘care’ in English has connotations of love and caring. He responded that that was fortunate since with the term ‘care’ he wanted to name the very general fact that “*Sein geht mich an,*” roughly, that being *gets to me*” (*Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 239, my emphasis). Heidegger wishes to emphasize that, ontologically speaking, Dasein’s *Sein* impacts on it somehow, and therefore must be dealt with in some way. Heidegger intentionally leaves this way open: Dasein “fills in the signification of the term ‘care,’ which is used in a purely ontologico-existentially manner” (BT, 237; SZ, 192).

Heidegger calls the three ‘ecstasies’⁴ of temporality, future, past, and present.⁵ The following discussion will reveal in stages how Heidegger understands an instantiation of Dasein to be a fundamentally historical *Seiende*.⁶

It is equally important at the outset of this section to note that in Heidegger’s self-understanding, he differentiates his position from that of any particular *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*, an appellation which Strauss puts to Heidegger repeatedly. In such a philosophical position, the ultimate basis of truth is the particular ‘view of the world’ to which one holds, be it a modern scientific view, a Romantic-poetic view, a religious view, and so forth. From these tensions, the task of a *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* is to develop a conceptual framework to take into account all of these sundry views on the world, in order to isolate the theoretical framework inherent in each. A primary aspect of any particular *Weltanschauung* is the present historical position in which the holder of that *Weltanschauung* finds him- or herself.⁷ Hence, for *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*, the historical aspect of the individual determines their view of the world. This position is oriented by an analysis of the past of a particular individual. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger, on the contrary, examines and gives emphasis to the futural aspects of the individual, and, as will be discussed below, prioritizes them. Heidegger’s advance over

⁴ Heidegger uses the Greek word ἰκστατικὸν (BT, 377; SZ, 329), which literally means ‘standing out.’ It is interesting to note that Heidegger gives us no German term to represent the Greek.

⁵ “To understand that originary time is in fact nothing other than the totality of the modalities of temporalization belonging to existence means precisely to understand the ekstatic character of time” (Françoise Dastur, “The Ekstatico-Horizontal Constitution of Temporality,” in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. Christopher Macann (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 163).

⁶ To anticipate the following discussion, David Couzens Hoy gives the reason for Heidegger’s turn in Division II of *Sein und Zeit* to history: “Heidegger must account for the way man remains self-identical through time, the way man can authentically project a unified future and past for himself in view of the ultimate limit that death imposes” (“History, Historicity, and Historiography in *Being and Time*,” in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 337-338.).

⁷ In a lecture course given in the same year as the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger posits that “...the world-view is something that in each case exists historically from, with, and for the factual Dasein” (BP, 6).

Weltanschauungsphilosophie is precisely his emphasis on the futural qualities of human existence, and his claim that it is these futural qualities which determine any understanding of both present and past. Heidegger's position must therefore be differentiated from that of a particular *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*.⁸

To begin an analysis of the futural qualities of Dasein, Heidegger claims that "Dasein becomes 'essentially' [*wesentlich*] Dasein in that authentic existence which constitutes itself as anticipatory resoluteness [*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*]" (BT, 370; SZ, 323). As the German of the just-quoted statement indicates, it is an essential aspect of Dasein that it 'run ahead' of itself (*vorlaufen*) through what Heidegger calls projection. Dasein projects itself in terms of its own possibilities, i.e., it makes plans for what it will do in the future based upon what it is in the present, which in turn is constituted by what it has been. However, as Dasein will eventually end in death—the cessation of Dasein—no matter what its choices, Heidegger considers Dasein's *Sein* to be fundamentally, both authentically and inauthentically, as Being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). Death is every Dasein's "ownmost possibility [*eigenste Möglichkeit*]" (BT, 304; SZ, 259), and as such is the limit of every possible projection of Dasein. Authentic Dasein must anticipate, or run ahead, of itself to this limit of its own *Sein*, which in turn "brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself [*es selbst zu sein*]...in an impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they,' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious [*ängstenden*]" (BT, 311, emphasis removed; SZ, 266).⁹ Only

⁸ Heidegger claims that *Weltanschauungsphilosophies*, concerned as they are about *Seiendes*, pass over the problem of the meaning of *Sein*, which it is the task of philosophy as Heidegger understands it to address. For Heidegger, any "'world-view' . . . , if it asserts anything about Dasein as Being-in-the-world, . . . must come back to the existential structures we have set forth, provided that its assertions are to make a claim to *conceptual* understanding" (BT, 224, Heidegger's emphasis; SZ, 180). Cf. BP, 10-11.

⁹ In a discussion of the essence of Heidegger's early conception of *Volk*, James Phillips notes that Dasein has an ambiguous relation to death: "[t]o anticipate death...is not the same as to desire death. Heidegger's

in this way does Dasein authentically become ‘*wesentlich*’ Dasein. We can thus say here that Dasein’s historical Being is determined fundamentally by its *finitude*.¹⁰

So much for this extremely brief recapitulation of anticipatory resoluteness and its relation to death. In the second section of chapter 2, I will examine the concepts of anxiety and death in greater detail. For now, we must examine death in the context of how the concept of anticipatory resoluteness leads Heidegger to posit Dasein’s *Sein* as temporal in character. To begin, Dasein as projection has a futural quality, in the sense that it projects itself into the future and extends itself to the limit of all limits, death. For Heidegger, anticipatory resoluteness is characterized by

Being towards one’s ownmost, distinctive potentiality-for-being. This sort of thing is possible in that Dasein can, indeed, come towards itself in its ownmost possibility, and that it can put up with this possibility as a possibility in thus letting itself come towards itself, in other words, that it exists. This letting-itself-come-towards-itself in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the future as coming towards [*Zukommen-lassen ist das ursprüngliche Phänomen der Zukunft*]. (BT, 372, emphasis removed; SZ, 325)

Heidegger emphasizes, through the etymology of ‘future’ in German, that Dasein ‘comes towards’ itself in anticipatory resoluteness, and through this motion is fundamentally futural in character. Heidegger next states that “[i]f either authentic or inauthentic Being-towards-death belongs to Dasein’s Being, then such Being-towards-death is possible only

community exists in a courtship of death. Nonetheless, it can only exist if it simultaneously defers death” (*Heidegger’s Volk: Between National Socialism and Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 71). As we shall see below, Heidegger’s conception of a political entity, a people (*Volk*), is an agglomeration of individual Daseins and thus possesses the same structure. As I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, Heidegger posits death to be that which ultimately grounds meaning for an individual and a people. It seems that Strauss is correct in this appellation.

¹⁰ For Dastur, death “is the foundation of [Dasein’s] finite existence” (“The Ekstatico-Horizontal Constitution of Temporality,” 165). As Dasein’s time on Earth is understood to be its own (*eigen*) finite time, as only Dasein may die for itself, Dastur further claims that this finitude “is able to provide the ultimate light for the knowledge of beings and for the comprehension of Being” (“The Ekstatico-Horizontal Constitution of Temporality,” 164). As well, in contrast to what could be called a ‘political’ understanding of Dasein’s historicity, “Dasein is said to be historical, not because of any participation in the events of a people’s public life, but rather because of its finitude” (Phillips, *Heidegger’s Volk*, 55).

as something futural” (BT, 372-373, emphasis removed; SZ, 325). Thus, ‘*wesentlich*’ Dasein, that which Dasein essentially *is*, “is futural in its Being in general” (BT, 373; SZ, 325).

Secondly, Dasein is also essentially composed of its own past. Dasein is ‘thrown’ (*geworfen*), i.e., its existence is not a result of its own decision or will, but rather it finds itself in the world arbitrarily or, more precisely, ‘without ground’ for its existence. In order to be authentic, Dasein must take over (*übernehmen*) its own thrownness (*Geworfenheit*). In this way, Heidegger states, “taking over thrownness signifies that Dasein is authentic in the way that it already was” (BT, 373, translation modified; SZ, 325).¹¹ This does not mean that in order to be authentic, Dasein must ‘dwell in the past.’ Rather, authenticity is only available through Dasein’s specific past, in the sense that Dasein’s own past must be taken over as its own past and recognized as such. In taking over its past, Dasein makes its past its own (*eigen*). Heidegger posits the link between Dasein’s past, or ‘having-been’ (*gewesen*), and future as follows:

[o]nly insofar as Dasein is as an ‘I-am-as-having-been,’ can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes back. As authentically futural, Dasein is authentically as ‘having been.’ Anticipation of one’s uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one’s ownmost ‘been.’ Only so far as it is futural can Dasein ‘be’ authentically as having been. The character of ‘having been’ arises, in a certain way, from the future. (BT, 373, emphasis removed; SZ, 326)

Through its anticipation of its own future death, Dasein is permitted to see again its own past and recognize that past *as* its own, i.e., authentically. Dasein’s finitude, understood as its own death, allows for Dasein to see its past as its past, i.e., to give that past authentic *meaning* for Dasein.

¹¹ “Übernahme der Geworfenheit...bedeutet, das Dasein in dem, *wie es je schon war*, eigentlich *sein*.”

Finally, Heidegger understands Dasein's conception of the present to arise from Dasein's projection forward and subsequent coming back to its own past authentically: "[a]nticipatory resoluteness discloses the current Situation of the 'there'" (BT, 373; SZ, 326). Through the futural anticipation of death bringing Dasein's past to itself authentically, the present is authentically disclosed.¹² *Seiendes* present in Dasein's environment (*Umwelt*) are disclosed authentically and understood in terms of Dasein's projects (*Entwürfe*) through anticipatory resoluteness. In this way Heidegger connects originary (*ursprünglich*) past, present, and future in the *Sein* of Dasein:

[t]he character of 'having been' arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present. This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as 'temporality.' Only in so far as Dasein has the definite character of temporality, is the authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole of anticipatory resoluteness, as we have described it, made possible for Dasein itself. Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care. (BT, 374, emphasis removed; SZ, 326)

This critical paragraph shows Heidegger to understand Dasein, the being which a human being *is*, to be most fundamentally characterized by its own temporality. This is because the meaning of Dasein's *Sein* is *Sorge*, and authentic *Sorge*'s ontological meaning or, as Heidegger says, "the primordial unity of the structure of care" (BT, 375; SZ, 327), has been shown to be temporality. Every human being exists as Dasein, and thereby *is* in accordance with the ontological structure of *Sorge*, which in turn has the ontological character of temporality. We can then say that human beings are, most fundamentally, *zeitlich* entities.

With the above discussion in mind, it is now possible to show how Heidegger understands the relation between temporality and history. Heidegger says that the

¹² For Heidegger, the term '*erschliessen*,' to disclose, is the essential quality of truth. Something true is something disclosed *as* something, i.e., in a particular way. I will briefly compare Strauss's and Heidegger's remarkably similar conceptions of truth in the Conclusion of this thesis.

“temporalization-structure of temporality...reveals itself as the historicity of Dasein” (BT, 381, translation modified; SZ, 332).¹³ Heidegger investigates how it is that Dasein possesses self-constancy (*Selbst-ständigkeit*), i.e., how it is that Dasein possesses something like an identity that persists over time, or, how Dasein can be considered as a particular being ‘connected’ to its own birth and death. In fact, it is temporality which gives Dasein “the soil on which to provide an unequivocal direction for the existential-ontological question of this ‘connectedness’” (BT, 425, translation modified; SZ, 373).¹⁴ Dasein experiences a double movement between birth and death, in the sense that it experiences a ‘stretching-along’ (*Erstreckung*) between the two aforementioned extremes of temporality, and also ‘stretches itself along’ (*erstreckt sich selbst*) between those two poles. I interpret this to mean that Dasein both experiences time as something that happens to it, and in a sense moves *itself* through time in the way that it projects itself forward into its future from out of its past. It is this double movement, an *erstreckten Sicherstreckens*, that Heidegger names the ‘historizing of Dasein’ (*das Geschehen des Daseins*).¹⁵ What we ordinarily consider to be history, the series of past events understood to have come before the present moment, is in fact for Heidegger a specific form of historizing, namely that of “existent Dasein which comes to pass in time, so that the historizing which is ‘past’ in our Being-with-one-another, and which at the same time has been ‘handed down to us’ and is continually effective, is regarded as ‘history’ [*Geschichte*] in the sense that gets

¹³ “...die Zeitungsstruktur der Zeitlichkeit...enthüllt sich als die *Geschichtlichkeit* des Daseins.”

¹⁴ “...den Boden, die existenzial-ontologische Frage nach dem genannten ‘Zusammenhang’ in eine eindeutige Richtung zu bringen.”

¹⁵ It is important to note the etymological connection, lost in English translation, between *Geschichte*, history in the special sense of what happens (and as opposed to the study of what happens (*Historie*)), and *Geschehen* (‘historizing’), as well as *Geschichtlichkeit* (‘historicity’) and, critically, *Geschick* and *Schicksal* (‘fate’ and ‘destiny,’ respectively), to be discussed forthwith. Ultimately, the common root of this locus of Heideggerian vocabulary is the verb *schicken*, ‘to send.’ This root has much resonance in Heidegger’s later thought, as we shall see in subsequent sections of this chapter.

emphasized” (BT, 431; SZ, 379). Thus, for Heidegger, history as it is ‘ordinarily’ understood is itself a derivation of Dasein’s activity of historicizing itself, that is, stretching itself along and being stretched along through time between birth and death.¹⁶

Heidegger next states that Dasein’s historicity is simply a “more concrete working-out of temporality” (BT, 434; SZ, 382), which is revealed through the process of phenomenological Interpretation.¹⁷ We can thus make the connection to our discussion of temporality above: Dasein’s *Geschichtlichkeit* is rooted in its more fundamental temporality and hence its temporalization structure, i.e., the structure of projection from out of the past into the future through the present. Dasein is fundamentally a historical being because it is fundamentally a temporal being, and its *Sein*, as *Sorge*, is temporal and, in a more concrete way (i.e., ontically), historical. The problem then becomes: “[from] whence, in general, Dasein can draw the possibilities upon which it factually projects itself” (BT, 434, emphasis removed; SZ, 383). Heidegger says that it is ‘resoluteness’ (*die Entschlossenheit*) which “discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them in terms of a heritage [*Erbe*] which that resoluteness, as thrown, takes over” (BT, 435 emphasis removed; SZ, 383).¹⁸ It is thus most fundamentally Dasein’s confrontation with death, with its ownmost extreme possibility as the end of all possibilities, which discloses the possibilities from which Dasein may choose and

¹⁶ Elaborating on this point, Catherine H. Zuckert writes that “[b]oth individuals and peoples have histories (*Geschichte*) because of the fundamentally temporal structure of human existence. These histories do not consist merely of records of past events or accumulations of factual information. There is always an element of selection; events are recorded with an eye to the anticipated end. In life, and thus in history, that end is projected; its achievement is uncertain. That is why resolve [*Entschlossenheit*] is needed. Human existence is not historically determined” (*Postmodern Platos*, 46).

¹⁷ Heidegger defines Interpretation thusly: “[i]n ontological Interpretation, an entity is to be laid bare with regard to its own state of Being [*Seinsverfassung*]” (BT, 275; SZ, 232). Hence, the *Seinsverfassung* of *Geschichtlichkeit* will be revealed to be temporality.

¹⁸ Emphasizing the arbitrary nature of Dasein’s heritage, in the sense that as *geworfen* Dasein is given its heritage *groundlessly*, Peg Birmingham says that “...the authentic moment discloses *contingent* historically and spatially rooted circumstances and practices” (“The Time of the Political,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1991), 27, emphasis in original).

appropriate authentically, and these possibilities always appear in the context of and derived from a heritage.¹⁹

Heidegger states that “only being-free for death gives Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude” (BT, 435, emphasis removed; SZ, 384).²⁰ It is through this process that Dasein realizes its fate (*Schicksal*), constituted by the authentically resolute appropriation of an existential possibility. As Dasein *is* most fundamentally its own possibilities, Dasein in effect “hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited [i.e., which it has derived from its *Erbe*], and yet has chosen [i.e., chosen through authentically resolute appropriation]” (BT, 435, my additions, emphasis removed; SZ, 384). Heidegger goes so far to say that “in the depths of its Being, Dasein is fate” (BT, 436, emphasis removed; SZ, 384).

Heidegger makes another move here, linking each individual Dasein with other historicizing Daseins, for Dasein is constituted fundamentally by *Miteinandersein*, being-with-others.²¹ This leads Heidegger to claim that authentically resolute projection, or historicizing, is essentially a co-projection or co-historizing with other Dasein. Thus, individual fates of Dasein are in a sense ‘determined’ as destiny (*Geschick*).²² For

¹⁹ In other words, “...authentic Dasein must disclose the authentic possibilities of its existence by starting from the inheritance [*Erbe*] that it accepts,” and “[f]or running [*vorlaufen*] into death means [this] acceptance...of all the possibilities, including the possibility of death, which it did not itself choose” (Richard Sembera, *Rephrasing Heidegger: A Companion to Being and Time* (Ottawa: The University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 214). As well, it is important again to emphasize that “Dasein does not spontaneously create its possibilities. The past *conditions* the range of possibilities. Yet it is up to Dasein to recognize its possibilities as such and to incorporate them into its existence” (Hoy, “History, Historicity, and Historiography in *Being and Time*,” in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, 341).

²⁰ It is important here to remember Dasein’s ambiguous relation to death, identified by Phillips; see n. 9 above.

²¹ An indicative passage: “The world of Dasein is a with-world [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is Being-with-Others [*Mitsein mit Anderen*]” (BT 155; SZ 118).

²² For Hoy, seemingly at odds with Strauss’s Heidegger interpretation, “[h]istoricity is precisely the ontological principle intended to keep the ontological project of *Being and Time* from lapsing into a subjectivistic relativism and nihilism” (“History, Historicity, and Historiography in *Being and Time*,” in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, 342-343). Hoy cites as an example the fact that “fate and destiny are

Heidegger, “Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein” (BT, 436; SZ, 384-385).²³ In choosing from amongst its own possibilities of existence, Dasein draws from the *Erbe* in which it finds itself (as *geworfen*), and, in making a choice authentically, i.e., in the light of the extreme possibility of death, Dasein’s choosing is conducted in a concomitant process with other Daseins in a shared *Geschick*. Heidegger’s use at this point of the term *Volk*, or ‘people,’ gives us pause: *Geschick* is “how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people *[[d]amit bezeichnen wir das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes]*” (BT 436; SZ 384). We can conclude that, for Heidegger, the unity of resolute Daseins, deciding in acknowledgement of death and hence apart from and in rejection of the options presented by *das Man*, is *ein eigentliches Volk*. And, equally as important, that upon which a *Volk* resolves is, necessarily for Heidegger, not provided by the purely ontological investigation of *Sein und Zeit*. Political philosophy, in Strauss’s sense, is absent from *Sein und Zeit*.²⁴

Finally, Heidegger connects fate to the previous discussion of *Sorge*:

[f]ate is that powerless superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversities—the power of projecting oneself upon one’s own Being-guilty, and of doing so reticently, with readiness for anxiety. As such, fate requires as the ontological condition for its possibility, the state of Being of care—that is to say, temporality. Only if death, guilt, conscience, freedom, and finitude reside together equiprimordially in the Being of an entity as they do in care,

intertwined” (343), and hence the possibility of an individual Dasein believing in relativism evaporates. However, if the problem is examined from the level of various *political* communities in conflict, or in Heidegger’s vocabulary various *Völker*, as Strauss’s political philosopher is wont to do, it is unclear how relativism can be avoided. The problem Strauss continuously wishes to emphasize is that, as it is purely an *ontological* investigation, Heidegger’s lack of political/ethical *content* makes his thinking both politically and philosophically problematic, from Strauss’s point of view.

²³ Heidegger notes his reliance on Dilthey’s conception of ‘generation’ here.

²⁴ Birmingham claims that the passage from SZ, 384 just quoted “calls into question any interpretation of the ‘we’ (*Mitgeschehen*) as the ‘we’ of a homogeneous totality;” rather, for Birmingham, a *Volk* is to be understood as “the heterogeneity of historical actors who constitute the event of destiny through their critical, *agonal* response to historical possibilities” (“The Time of the Political,” 30). Even if this is the case, the political result of such an interpretation still disallows political philosophy in Strauss’s sense. The idea of ‘the’ good regime, or ‘the’ good political system, is for Heidegger impossible to attain from the start.

can that entity exist in the mode of fate; that is to say, only then can it be historical in the very depths of its existence. (BT, 436-437; SZ, 385)

This critical paragraph summarizes the connection between *Sorge*, *Temporalität*, and *Geschichtlichkeit*, and thus indicates Heidegger's understanding of the connection between *Geschichte* and *Geschichtlichkeit*. Dasein's meaning of *Sein* is *Sorge*, which has been shown to have the character, ontologically speaking, of *Temporalität*.²⁵ Dasein's *Geschichtlichkeit* is a particular mode of its more fundamental *Temporalität*. If Dasein is *Temporalität*, then human beings, each of whom instantiates Dasein, must be fundamentally temporal in their *Sein*, and thus all understandings of that *Sein* are fundamentally *geschichtlich*. For Heidegger, transcendence of one's historical situation is impossible. Dasein can authentically appropriate its own heritage and project itself into the future from out of that heritage,²⁶ but it cannot transcend its heritage. Further, that heritage is fundamentally contingent; Dasein does not choose it, but merely makes the decision to comport itself to it authentically or inauthentically. For Heidegger, there is no possibility to attain truth that is not at its basis dependent upon the historical situation into which Dasein, the *Seiende* who discloses truth, is thrown.²⁷ It seems that Strauss's criticism is apt: from

²⁵ "Authentic Being-toward-death—that is to say, the finitude of temporality—is the hidden ground [*Grund*] of Dasein's historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*]" (BT, 438, translation modified, emphasis removed; SZ, 386).

²⁶ This passage explains Heidegger's sense of 'overcoming history' in the *Sophist* lectures: "[o]nly if we are historical [*geschichtlich*] will we understand history [*die Geschichte*], and if it is understood, it is *eo ipso* overcome [*überwunden*]" (PS, 177, translation modified; GA 19, 257). Such overcoming does not lead to 'eternal' truth, but rather constitutes the absolute closure of any possibility of temporal transcendence.

²⁷ As Joseph J. Kockelmans concludes, "if Dasein itself as well as its own understanding are intrinsically historical, then the inquiry into Being itself is to be characterized by historicity as well" ("Heidegger on Time and Being," in *Martin Heidegger: In Europe and America*, eds. Edward G. Ballard and Charles S. Scott (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 57). According to Heidegger, then, philosophical examination conceived in the first place as ontology is historical through and through; there is no escape to a transcendental position from which to contemplate the 'eternal' character of Being. As an aside, it is also interesting to note a similarity to Strauss here, one which I will elaborate in chapter 3 of this thesis: "[b]ecause human existence is essentially historical, Heidegger saw, philosophers do not and cannot begin their investigations, as Descartes urged, from scratch. Like all other human beings, philosophers begin with opinions, views, or 'truths' they have inherited from the past" (*Postmodern Platos*, 48). This is evinced in Strauss's remark that Heidegger's thought constitutes the "old Socratic warning" that that thinking is incomplete and defective if the thinking being, the thinking individual, forgets himself as what he is" ("Existentialism," 303).

the perspective of Socratic philosophy as Strauss understands it, Heidegger effectively dismisses the possibility of philosophy ever achieving its fundamental goal of transhistorical truth about the whole.²⁸ In allegorical language, Heidegger's thought produces a historical 'cave beneath the cave' from which it is necessary to escape in order to begin philosophical investigation as Strauss (and as Strauss claims Plato) understands it.²⁹

For Strauss, it is recognition of the fact of the thrown and hence groundless character of Dasein's existence which causes the experience of *Angst*, an experience which Strauss claims Heidegger to hold as the primary experience of being human. It is to Heidegger's understanding of *Angst* to which we now must turn.

2.3 Heidegger's Conception of *Angst* as Originary Experience

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Strauss claims Heidegger to hold that *Angst*, or anxiety, is a fundamental human experience, one which in turn is not subject to philosophical scrutiny in order to see if it in fact is such an experience. Strauss claims that *Angst* arises through modern humanity recognizing the fundamentally arbitrary basis of its choices, namely its historical situation. For Strauss, then, *Angst* arises from this recognition of an essential feature of humanity, a feature unknown to premodern philosophy. Strauss considers Heidegger's analysis of and attribution of importance to *Angst* to be dependent on

²⁸ "Lacking tšl oj, purpose, or goal, Dasein's critical response (*Erwidert*) to the moment (*Augenblick*) cannot be justified by any other point in time. To use Kantian language, it is an end-in-itself" (Birmingham, "The Time of the Political," 33).

²⁹ See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 136 n. 2. Catherine H. Zuckert analyzes Strauss's view of Heidegger by noting that "Heidegger did not understand either politics or philosophy 'originally' enough, Strauss suggests on the basis of his reading of the non-historicist Plato, fundamentally because he understood existence too historically" (*Postmodern Platos*, 166). This overemphasis on history, Strauss believes, amounts to an artificial obstacle to the natural first position of (non-historicist) philosophy in the Platonic sense.

the fundamentally modern character of his thought. *Angst*, and the experience of history which is its basis, are dealt with in an entirely different manner by ancient philosophy, which considers the experience of history to be a crucial step in the process of being able to recognize the limitations of one's historical situation and therewith transcend it, or, in other words, to recognize the cave's walls for what they are and then to climb out of it.

However, Heidegger does not claim to be doing specifically modern philosophy. Rather, Heidegger claims to be responding to the entire history of philosophy, and posits *Sein und Zeit* as a direct response to the most fundamental questions of Plato and Aristotle. For Heidegger, the experience of *Angst* allows us to experience Dasein as it 'really' is, i.e., as it is in its ontological structure freed from the sediment of the history of philosophy. *Angst* is a radical experience, radical enough to reveal the ontological-temporal character of Dasein through its revealing of Dasein's thrownness (*Geworfenheit*).³⁰ We must now examine how Heidegger conceives of *Angst* in *Sein und Zeit* to see how this is the case.³¹

In order to accomplish this task, we must also examine some of Heidegger's concepts he uses in order to determine the proper place for *Angst* in his conceptual scheme. First, Heidegger considers 'everyday' (*alltäglich*) Dasein, that is to say inauthentic Dasein, to be in a state of 'falling' (*Verfallen*). It is important to note that Heidegger considers the various aspects of *Verfallen*, identified as idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, to be properly understood as ontological concepts, so as to avoid the accusation of a "moralizing critique

³⁰ Dreyfus remarks that *Angst* reveals "Dasein simple and whole," in the sense that it "serves as a breakdown that reveals the nature of Dasein and its world" (*Being-in-the-World*, 177). More precisely, Sembera states that *Angst* "brings Dasein before its world as the world and before itself as itself" (*Rephrasing Heidegger*, 116). It is evident from these two passages that in the context of *Sein und Zeit*, *Angst* is one of, if not the, most important events or experience that Dasein will undergo on its path to *Eigentlichkeit*.

³¹ Heidegger also discusses *Angst* in detail in his lecture, "Was ist die Metaphysik?" I reserve my analysis of this work to the footnotes of this section.

of everyday Dasein” (BT, 211; SZ, 167).³² Heidegger identifies *Verfallen* as “a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness,” and which has “mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they’” (BT, 220; SZ, 175). In *Verfallenheit*, Dasein “has, in the first instance, always already fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the World” (BT, 220, translation modified; SZ, 175).³³ Heidegger thus names *Verfallenheit* as Dasein’s inauthentic mode of *Sein*.

In *Verfallenheit*, says Heidegger, Dasein accomplishes a “fleeing...in the face of itself...as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-itself” (BT, 229, translation modified; SZ, 184).³⁴ In other words, Dasein rejects its own authentic possibilities to be itself, understood in light of its own death as was discussed above. Instead, it embraces the inauthentic possibilities offered by *das Man*, Heidegger’s term for the way in which ‘one’ or ‘they’ comports oneself or themselves in light of a given situation,³⁵ by contrast, *eigentlich* Dasein does not comport itself in this manner. Dasein’s turning to the possibilities offered by *das Man* is not grounded in fear (*Furcht*), however, as fear is always fear of something, fear of

³² Heidegger is attempting to avoid the possibility of an ethical result or suggestion being derived from his ontological investigation. He continues to hold this position later in his career, see, e.g., “Brief über des ‘Humanismus,’” where he asks the question of what happens “if both ‘ontology’ and ‘ethics,’ along with all thinking in terms of disciplines, becomes untenable” (PM, 269; GA 9, 354). It is uncertain that he in fact accomplishes this. According to Strauss, Heidegger intended his thought to hold that “ethics is impossible,” and this intention was evinced by the confrontation at Davos between Heidegger and Cassirer; see Strauss, “Existentialism,” 304, and my discussion of this lecture in chapter 1 of this thesis. Recently, some interpreters have claimed that it is possible to derive a quasi-Kantian ethic from Heidegger’s thought, a derivation perhaps against the way in which he intended himself to be read. For example, in *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Julian Young claims there to be a quasi-Kantian ‘universalist’ morality imminent in the structure of *Sein und Zeit* (104). However, it is unclear how such a moral position, as universalizable, would not be criticized from Heidegger’s perspective as simply being another instantiation of the morality of *das Man*.

³³ “Das Dasein ist von ihm selbst als eigentlichem Selbstseinkönnen zunächst immer schon abgefallen und an die ‘Welt’ verfallen.” It is important to note that Dasein is, in the first place (*zunächst*), always already (*immer schon*) in the state of *Verfallenheit*. Dasein must permanently begin in or start from the lostness of *das Man*, and must then struggle to overcome this lostness.

³⁴ “*Flucht*... vor ihm selbst als eigentlichem Selbst-sein-können.”

³⁵ *Das Man* is for Heidegger fundamentally the realm of the ‘common-sensical,’ in the sense of what the average Dasein would do in a given situation. Here we see Heidegger’s denigration of the average opinions of political life, those opinions which serve as Strauss’s source of philosophical truth. I will discuss this crucial difference between the two thinkers in chapter 3 of this thesis.

a particular *Seiende* that has “the character of a threatening” (BT, 230; SZ, 185). In fact, in Dasein’s turning away from its authentic self, Dasein turns towards and absorbs itself within *Seiendes* and thus becomes inauthentic. The turning, then, is not grounded on fear of any particular thing; rather, it is grounded on the turning away from Dasein’s basic state of *In-der-Welt-sein*. Heidegger names this ground as *Angst*, or anxiety/dread.³⁶ For Heidegger, “that in the face of which one has anxiety is Being-in-the-world as such,” something that “is completely indefinite” (BT, 230-231, emphasis removed; SZ, 186). *Angst* “is characterized by the fact that what threatens is nowhere” (BT, 231, emphasis removed; SZ, 186).³⁷ For Dasein, what “oppresses” it “is not this or that, nor is it everything present-at-hand taken together as a totality; it is rather the possibility of the ready-to-hand in general, that is to say, it is the world [*die Welt*] itself” (BT, 231, emphasis removed, translation modified; SZ, 187).³⁸

We must next examine what Heidegger means by *die Welt* to understand the sentence just quoted. Heidegger defines *die Welt* as “that in terms of which the ready-to-hand is ready-to-hand” (BT, 114; SZ, 83). Readiness-to-hand, *Zuhandenheit*, is the state of *Sein* of equipment (*das Zeug*), that is, those *Seiendes* which are understood as useful in terms of Dasein’s projects. This means that *zuhandenen Seiendes* are always understood as for the sake of Dasein’s projects. Heidegger goes so far as to call Dasein “the sole authentic for-the-sake-of-which” (BT, 117; SZ, 84). Now, ready-to-hand entities must appear as such ‘outside’ of Dasein, for in order to be entities they must be in a way separate from Dasein.

³⁶ While Heidegger does not explicitly discuss it, he relies much on Kierkegaard’s conception of anxiety, or dread, as it is elaborated in *The Concept of Dread*. Strauss acknowledges this reliance in “Relativism,” 151; see chapter 1, 66 of this thesis.

³⁷ For Dreyfus, *Angst* “reveals the whole world as if from outside. It reveals the groundlessness of the world and of Dasein’s being-in-the-world” (*Being-in-the-World*, 179). *Angst* uproots Dasein, making its own existence seem foreign, or not of the world.

³⁸ “Was beengt, ist nicht dieses oder jenes, aber auch nicht alles Vorhandene zusammen als Summe, sondern die *Möglichkeit* von Zuhandenem überhaupt, das heißt die Welt selbst.”

Heidegger calls this “the in-which [*Wobei*] and the with-which [*Womit*] of involvements” (BT, 118; SZ, 86), or the location/context³⁹ in which equipmental entities appear in the context of Dasein’s projects, and their relation to each other. Showing how the above concepts hang together,

Dasein always already assigns itself from a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ to the ‘with-which’ of an involvement; that is to say, to the extent that it is, it always lets entities be encountered as ready-to-hand. That wherein Dasein understands itself beforehand in the mode of assigning is that for which it has let entities be encountered beforehand. The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this ‘wherein’ is the phenomenon of the world. (BT, 119, translation modified; SZ, 86)⁴⁰

Dasein assigns itself to particular projects it chooses, and thereby allows entities to be encountered as equipment. Before such assignment occurs, Dasein finds itself in a particular ‘there’ or ‘*da.*’ This is reflected Dasein’s condition of being *immer schon geworfen*.⁴¹ Dasein is always already thrown into a world, and the world is most fundamentally the *context* in which Dasein understands entities surrounding it to be used in the course of carrying out its projects.⁴²

Each Dasein has its world, its own context in which it finds itself, and in relation to which it carries out its projects. Heidegger discusses the ontological features or structural

³⁹ It is important to note that Heidegger does not mean a particular *spatial* location in relation to Dasein.

⁴⁰ “Dasein verweist sich je schon immer aus einem Worum-willen her an das Womit einer Bewandnis, das heißt es läßt je immer schon, sofern es ist, Seiendes als Zuhandenes begegnen. *Worin* das Dasein sich vorgängig versteht im Modus des Sichverweisens, das ist das *Woraufhin* des vorgängigen Begegnenlassens von Seiendem. *Das Worin des sichverweisenden Verstehens als Woraufhin des Begegnenlassens von Seiendem in der Seinsart der Bewandnis ist das Phänomen der Welt.*”

⁴¹ See BT, 120-121; SZ, 87: “Dasein, in so far as it is, has already submitted itself [*je schon sich...angewiesen*] to a world which it encounters, and this submission [*Angewiesenheit*] belongs essentially to its Being.” It is important to note that *anweisen* means to assign or to instruct, and thus the translation ‘submitted’ here means something like ‘submitted to orders,’ orders that Dasein gives to itself.

⁴² For Dreyfus, in *Angst*, “Dasein discovers that it has no meaning or content of its own; nothing individualizes it by empty thrownness” (*Being-in-the-World*, 180). Ontologically speaking, then, human beings, the beings which instantiate Dasein, themselves have no ontological content; they are mere formal structures which are then ‘filled’ by the particular ontic content determined by their ‘there.’

elements of the world, what he calls the ‘worldhood’ (*die Weltlichkeit*) of the world. *Weltlichkeit* can be understood as a ‘system of relations’ (*Relationssystem*) between Dasein and the *zuhanden Seiendes* which surround it, i.e., something that is distinguishable from both Dasein and *zuhanden Seiendes*, while at the same time not existing as a *Seiende* itself. The world *is* only in relation to Dasein, and cannot exist as world apart from its character as the context in which Dasein assigns itself to its projects and thereby allows *Seiendes* to reveal themselves as *zuhanden*.⁴³

How, then, does *die Welt* oppress Dasein in *Angst*? According to Heidegger,

[a]nxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. Therefore, with that which it is anxious about, anxiety discloses Dasein as Being-possible, and indeed as the only kind of thing which it can be of its own accord as something individualized in individualization. (BT, 232, emphasis removed; SZ, 187-188)

In anxiety, then, Dasein is anxious about, most fundamentally, *itself*, or its own situation as a potentiality-for-Being. *Angst* arises when Dasein realizes that it must be its own ground for an authentic decision, and that there is no eternal or permanent support upon which Dasein may rely to justify that decision. Dasein is temporal and thrown, and any attempt to cover over this fact with appeals to the permanence of human nature, natural right, or the like is, for Heidegger, an obfuscation of the true or authentically disclosed situation of Dasein. Heidegger thus radicalizes the modern historicist assumption that all thought is determined by its age: the ‘way’ to proper understanding of this assumption is only

⁴³ “In the sensibility [*Befindlichkeit*] of angst we understand what the world is—the system of references that Dasein carries along with it in order to exist” (Sembera, *Rephrasing Heidegger*, 115). The *Welt*, understood in the Heideggerian sense, is ultimately dependent upon the more fundamental being of Dasein.

available to those who comprehend the historical situatedness of Dasein, to those who are already *committed* to a particular understanding of that situatedness.⁴⁴

When we acknowledge the truth of Dasein's temporality, says Heidegger, we feel 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*). Heidegger emphasizes the etymology of this word in German, noting the literal meaning as 'without-home-like,' or 'not-at-home.' Dasein is uprooted from its complacency, or being as *das Man* would be,⁴⁵ through *Angst*, and is thus individualized.⁴⁶ The true *eigentlich* situation of Dasein is to be an individual without metaphysical support or shelter. As Heidegger says, "[a]nxiety discloses an insignificance of the world, and this insignificance reveals the nullity [*Nichtigkeit*] of that with which one can concern oneself" (BT, 393; SZ, 343), i.e., the lack of ground, the *Abgrund*, at the basis of all human choice.⁴⁷ Finally, *Angst* "brings one back to the pure 'that-it-is' [*Daß*] of one's ownmost individualized thrownness" (BT, 394; SZ, 343). We can see with this last sentence that *Angst* is the 'mood' (*die Stimmung*) which reveals Dasein's most fundamental character to itself, namely that it is its own thrown, projecting possibilities, *and nothing more*. There is no basis for Dasein's choices other than the fact that they *are* Dasein's

⁴⁴ "The historicist thesis expresses a fundamental experience which, by its nature, is incapable of adequate expression on the level of noncommitted or detached thought" (Strauss, NRH, 27). See my discussion in chapter 3 of this thesis, of Heidegger's understanding of the interpretation of texts which, as much as Dasein's interpretation of its world, is rooted in the historical situation of the interpreter.

⁴⁵ "Anxiety dispels the illusion that we have been 'living concretely'" (W.R. Newell, "Heidegger on Freedom and Community: Some Political Implications of His Early Thought," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 1984), 778), that is, that we have been leading lives which have their basis or derive their direction in something permanently and universally true. *This* sort of life is the one suggested by *das Man*, and is hence fundamentally inauthentic.

⁴⁶ For Richard A. Cohen, Dasein's experience of *Angst* permits, through the concomitant "recognition of mortality...[,] a profound *realization* [*sic*] of the self, a deepening, awakening, or taking over of its own ontological self-relationship" ("Authentic Selfhood in Heidegger and Rosenzweig," *Human Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1/2 (1993), 117). More generally, Mark Blitz notes that for Heidegger, moods, most prominently the mood of anxiety, "make clear to myself as the very one who I am here and now, irreducible to other entities, and they then enable or direct me to disclose other beings in their being in a way correlated to the disposition in which I find myself" ("Heidegger and the Political," *Political Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April 2000), 182).

⁴⁷ Magda King states succinctly that *Angst* "reveal[s] the negating of the nothing in the being of beings" (*A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. John Llewelyn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 239).

choices, and that they are appropriated authentically and hence *committed to*.⁴⁸ For Heidegger, the experience of *Angst* reveals the fundamental *Abgrund* or nothingness at the base of Dasein, and thereby the *Abgrund* or nothingness at the base of the *Seiendes* which instantiate Dasein, humans.⁴⁹ In this way, then, *Angst* is the basic experience of human beings, as Strauss claimed Heidegger to hold.⁵⁰ Heidegger thus exemplifies Strauss's assessment that it is only through 'committed' thought, holding to its radical historical situatedness, that the proper comprehension of this experience can be grasped. In the context of Strauss's understanding of modern philosophy, Heidegger is accurately described as the 'most radical' modern.

Strauss also claims that the 'experience of history' is a basic experience for so-called 'Heideggerian existentialism.' As was mentioned above, *Angst* reveals Dasein's essential thrownness. However, thrownness is constituted by being thrown into a particular temporal situation. Following Heidegger, we may tentatively state that the acknowledgement of Dasein's own temporality, understood as its historicity, is more

⁴⁸ Elaborating, Dreyfus writes that "...any possibility can provide a unique occasion in which to face anxiety and, having abandoned hope of 'eternal' meaning or satisfaction, do whatever I do in the Situation impeccably and passionately simply because it demands to be done" (*Being-in-the-World*, 327). As Dasein's choices are derived ultimately from its historically-determined *Geworfenheit*, it is not entirely accurate to say that Heidegger promotes a 'decisionist' or 'situationist' ethics; however, his position flirts dangerously close to one. Karl Löwith claims that "it is no accident if Heidegger's existential ontology corresponds to a political 'decisionism' in Carl Schmitt" (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 215); this important relation must be examined at another time, however.

⁴⁹ See Heidegger's discussion of anxiety in "What is Metaphysics?," where he elaborates, in much the same way as *Sein und Zeit*'s discussion of the essential nullity at the base of Dasein, how it is that anxiety "makes manifest the Nothing" (PM, 88; GA 9, 112).

⁵⁰ It is worth quoting Michael E. Zimmerman's conclusion concerning *Angst* in full, as it sums up much of the preceding discussion: "...Heidegger maintained that the mood of anxiety reveals the nothingness lying at the heart of human existence. While contending that anxiety is perhaps the most basic human mood, he also observed that it is such a disquieting mood that we spend most of our lives trying to keep it from overtaking us. Our unreflective absorption in the practices of everyday life—family relations, schooling, job activities, entertainment—keep us distracted enough that we manage to conceal from ourselves the weirdness of being human. Anxiety tears us out of everyday absorption in things; it reveals them to be useless in the face of the radical mortality, finitude, and nothingness at the heart of human existence" ("Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 244).

primordial than *Angst* as it is ultimately the cause of *Angst*. Dasein's historicity is the ontological basis of an individual Dasein's ontic experience of *Angst*. To put it succinctly, Dasein's *Unheimlichkeit* is a result of the acknowledgement of Dasein's *Geworfenheit*, and, as *Geworfenheit* is characterized by Dasein's *Geschichtlichkeit*, *Unheimlichkeit* can therefore be seen as a result of the acknowledgement of Dasein's *Geschichtlichkeit*. We, as Dasein, experience our own temporal/historical character through the *Stimmung* of *Angst*. The 'experience of history' and *Angst*, both identified by Strauss as the fundamental experience for Heidegger, turn out to be two sides of the same coin, the ontic and the ontological meanings of the same experience. For Strauss, the problem appears if one holds such an experience to be the basic human experience, and Strauss identifies such a position as quintessentially the final radicalization of specifically modern philosophical tendencies.

Further, as I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, Strauss accuses Heidegger of a particularly *moral* absence or failure. This accusation finds ammunition in Heidegger's conception of *Angst*. *Angst* arises through the previous denigration, subsequent to recognition of the fundamental arbitrariness, of 'common-sense' morality, i.e., for Heidegger the morality of *das Man*.⁵¹ However, the morality of *das Man* also happens to be the reigning morality of a particular historical situation. Hence, if *Angst* reveals the arbitrary character of that reigning morality, it contributes to political instability. For Heidegger, *Angst* is also the basis for Dasein's *freedom*. Heidegger states as much: *Angst* both "liberates [the individual] *from* possibilities which 'count for nothing,' and lets him become free *for* those possibilities which are authentic" (BT, 395; SZ, 344, Heidegger's

⁵¹ The morality of *das Man* would include any moral position claiming to reflect the permanent and universal character of human existence. As Karsten Harries notes, for Heidegger, "[w]ith the attempt to establish everydayness [i.e., the character of *das Man*] as a foundation, inauthenticity triumphs over *philosophy*" ("Fundamental Ontology and the Search for Man's Place", in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, 77, my emphasis). This is fundamentally at odds with Strauss's position concerning the source of philosophical truth, i.e., nature. I will discuss this problem further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

emphasis).⁵² For Heidegger, *Angst* thereby shakes the foundations of any ethical position claiming to make binding normative claims based on supposedly permanent standards.⁵³ The inherent radicality of Heidegger's position places him in the company of the other thinkers who wished to destroy or overcome reigning opinion for the sake of the new, all of whom were/are children of the Enlightenment. This position, Strauss would claim, fails to recognize the dependence of philosophy on the reigning regime, and thus fails to recognize the inherent political aspect of philosophical activity. Heidegger thus is the archetypal figure of the modern tendency not to recognize the permanent tension between philosophical and political life, and the necessary relation to political life philosophy must thereby adopt.⁵⁴

2.4 Heidegger's 'Religious' Thinking

As I indicated in chapter 1 of this thesis, Strauss accuses Heidegger over and over of having a 'religious' character present in his thinking. Following from the previous discussion of *Angst*, it is interesting at the outset of this section to examine a sentence from Heidegger's footnote on page 190 of *Sein und Zeit*: "it is no accident that the phenomena of

⁵² "The preeminent revealing power of [*Angst*] lies in bringing Dasein before the finite freedom of his [*sic*] being-in-the-world, as the same being into which he is already thrown and delivered" (King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, 95)

⁵³ "Angst in Heidegger's sense reveals something like a global incapacity vis-à-vis the normativity of all laws and oughts" (Steven Crowell, "Conscience and Reason: Heidegger and the Grounds of Intentionality," in *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)), 55). Dasein is incapable of adhering to those 'laws and oughts,' those ethical standards which the realm of *das Man* imposes on it. Rather, Dasein must adopt its own ethical standard, in part by recognizing the arbitrary character of *all* ethical standards. Heidegger thus recommends a sort of Kantian self-legislation of the moral law. The ethic of authentic Dasein is not, then, subject to the vicissitudes of historical change; rather, "[b]eing open-minded to [Dasein's] anxiety and advancing freely toward the inevitable end [i.e., the death of Dasein] is the highest test of man's freedom from contingency" (Karl Löwith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. Arnold Levinson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 38).

⁵⁴ I discuss this relation further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

anxiety and fear, which have never been distinguished in a thoroughgoing manner, have come within the purview of Christian theology ontically and even (though within very narrow limits) ontologically” (BT, 492, Division 1, Chapter 6, n. iv; SZ, 190, n. 1). Thus, it seems that, at least initially, it is not an error to think of the concept of *Angst* as religious in nature. One could initially say, for example, that *Angst* occurs when humans acknowledge that they are essentially a *Nichts* without God. However, as Heidegger continues: “[t]his has happened whenever the anthropological problem of man’s Being towards God has won priority and when questions have been formulated under the guidance of phenomena like faith, sin, love, and repentance” (BT, 492, Division 1, Chapter 6, n. iv; SZ, 190, n. 1). Heidegger thus implies that his investigation of *Angst* and *Furcht* is to be distinguished from a Christian anthropological one, as Heidegger does not formulate his questions or carry out his investigations under the guidance of the aforementioned theological concepts. Heidegger seems to understand his work in *Sein und Zeit* to differ fundamentally from any sort of ‘religious’ thinking, or at least Christian theological thinking. However, this contrasts with Heidegger’s earlier characterization of himself as a “‘Christian theologian.’”⁵⁵ Although the meaning of this statement is debatable to say the least, it at

⁵⁵ From a letter to Karl Löwith dated August 19, 1921, published as an appendix in Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 236. This is of course long before Heidegger holds the agnostic position of *Sein und Zeit*, and very long before what Strauss considers to be Heidegger’s *Kehre* into the ‘prophet’ of Being. Strauss seems never to have abandoned the implications of Heidegger’s words, though. It is also important here to consider Strauss’s notion that Judaism and Islam both rejected the possibility of the assimilation of reason and revelation, unlike Christianity. For Strauss, “[r]evelation as understood by Jews and Muslims has the character of Law (*Tora*, *Shari’a*) rather than of Faith,” and as a result, “[f]or the Christian, the sacred doctrine is revealed theology; for the Jew and the Muslim, the sacred doctrine is, at least primarily, the legal interpretation of the divine law (*talmud* or *fiqh*)” (JPCM, 419, 426). This meant that “the status of philosophy was, as a matter of principle, much more precarious in Judaism and in Islam than in Christianity: in Christianity philosophy became an integral part of the officially recognized and even required training of the student of the sacred doctrine” (JPCM, 426). To sum up Strauss’s remarks, in the Christian world there had been a mixture of philosophy and theology, or a mixture of reason and revelation; due to a differing conception of the meaning of revelation, this mixture was not possible for the Jewish or Muslim perspectives. Strauss’s idea of revelation as Law also impacts on his conception of the relation between religion and

least opens the question that Strauss may have interpreted Heidegger in accordance with Heidegger's own early self-interpretation, even in light of Heidegger's later movement away from Christianity. Given this ambiguous relation at least to Christian 'religious' thinking, does Strauss's accusation of 'religious thinker' to Heidegger indeed apply?⁵⁶

I will now attempt to develop a response based in Heidegger's texts to the important critical points of Strauss's accusation. The first point is that the categories of *Sein und Zeit* are themselves derived from religious thinking, and therefore Heidegger is unable to extract his philosophical thought from religious understanding of human beings.⁵⁷ Strauss

politics, which, as I will show in this section, is the most important conditioning element of his understanding of Heidegger as a 'religious thinker.'

⁵⁶ I will not examine Heidegger's repeated identification of God as a particular *Seiende*, as distinguished from *Sein* in general, a distinction following Heidegger's consigning of religious faith to ontic life rather than having an influence on the ontology of *Dasein* (see most explicitly GA 9, 331: "[d]as 'Sein'—das ist nicht Gott;"). John Macquarrie does not hold God and Being sufficiently apart ("...God or Being or whatever name we use....," *Heidegger and Christianity* (New York and London: Continuum, 1994), 107). As Sonia Sikka writes, the abyss (*Abgrund*) of *Sein* "is not God but that which lets God and gods be" (*Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 252).

⁵⁷ Strauss's interpretation is nearly identical to that of Karl Löwith on this point: "All of [Heidegger's concepts] originated in the *Christian* tradition, however much death, conscience, guilt, care, anxiety, and corruption are formalized ontologically and neutralized as concepts of *the Dasein*" (Nature, History, and Existentialism *and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 68, Löwith's emphasis). Löwith goes on to say that "[t]he origin of these essential concepts of existence in Christian theology prevents Heidegger from freely acknowledging what is the real freedom towards death, i.e., the freedom towards death as it would have to be for a *Dasein* which makes itself independent and recognizes no higher court than its own death" (Nature, History, and Existentialism *and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 68). For Löwith, then, Heidegger's lack of acknowledging the Christian basis of his concepts prevents him from fully freeing himself from those concepts. Gadamer inadvertently admits the same point, although for him it is not a problem: "[i]s *Dasein*'s character of guilt really neutral vis-à-vis the Christian history of faith, and is it independent of it? Or is the wish to have conscience, or the running ahead toward death? Heidegger would scarcely be able, nor would he be obliged, to deny this for himself and for the ground of his experience. He would only insist that each human life is able to realize from the ground of human experience that life is finality, 'Being that moves toward death' (*Sein zum Tode*). Consequently, *the conceptual explanation of the Christian experience of faith would find its application in every person*" ("The Religious Dimension in Heidegger," in *Transcendence and The Sacred*, eds. Allan M. Olson and Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 204, my emphasis). Charles Bambach notes the influence of Christian thinking, specifically the "early Christian experience of 'being wakeful' (*wachsam sein*)" to the possible advent of *Sein* (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 212) on Heidegger. Heidegger reinterprets this way of being in an at least agnostic way, however, for *wachsam sein* is fundamentally "*Dasein*'s being wakeful for itself" (Heidegger, GA 63, 15, quoted in Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 212, emphasis removed). Bambach also echoes Löwith when he states that Heidegger "did not merely borrow ideas from theology; he forged them into a new language that he hoped would work against the abstract conceptuality of metaphysics and call attention to the 'crisis' of Western culture and history" (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 200). I will discuss Heidegger's conception of 'crisis' later in this chapter. In a more critical vein, Ian Loadman notes that "[n]one

identifies four categories from *Sein und Zeit* which are claimed to be religious in character: “conscience, guilt, being-unto-death, anguish” (“Existentialism,” 313). As *Angst*, or anguish/anxiety, has just been examined, I will focus attention here on the first three. At the end of this investigation, I hope to elaborate how all four categories function interdependently, and also show why Strauss chose these particular four categories from the many more available in *Sein und Zeit*.

The first category I will examine is conscience (*Gewissen*). In Heidegger’s overall philosophical project in *Sein und Zeit*, *Gewissen* ‘discloses’ (*erschließt*) something about Dasein. Heidegger begins from a phenomenological standpoint, and thus takes conscience to be a given occurrence for Dasein and not something whose existence is debatable. *Gewissen* shows up for Dasein as a ‘voice’ (*Stimme*).⁵⁸ *Gewissen* is crucial for Dasein’s *Eigentlichkeit*,

because Dasein is lost in the ‘they,’ [and] it must first find itself. In order to find itself at all, it must be ‘shown’ to itself in its possible authenticity. In terms of its possibility, Dasein is already a potentiality-for-Being-its-self, but it needs to have this potentiality attested. (BT, 313, emphasis removed; SZ, 268)

Gewissen is the process or feature of Dasein which accomplishes this showing. In other words, *Gewissen* shows Dasein to itself as its own possibility, and thereby allows Dasein to distance itself from *das Man* and the possibilities associated with it. For Dasein, *Gewissen*

of [the similarities between Heidegger’s thought and Christianity] go very far in undermining Heidegger’s analysis unless one adds the assumption that Christian theology has so completely misunderstood basic elements of human existence that any resemblance to theology renders philosophy faulty” (Loadman, “Historical Sickness: Strauss and Heidegger,” 24). As I will argue at the end of this section, however, it is precisely Strauss’s understanding of the relation between religion and politics, summed up in the idea of the ‘theologico-political problem,’ that leads him to posit the relation between Heidegger’s thought and religion as problematic.

⁵⁸ It is important to note that for Heidegger, the conscience does not necessarily disclose in a linguistic manner, and can in fact call “noiselessly [*lärmlos*]” (BT, 316; SZ, 271) or silently. The idea of silence, in contradistinction to rational speech, will become more important in Heidegger’s later writings, as I will discuss below.

appears as a ‘call’ (*Ruf*), and this *Ruf* “has the character of an appeal to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-itself, and this is done by way of summoning it to its ownmost Being-guilty” (BT, 314, emphasis removed; SZ, 269). I will examine the relation to guilt below; for now, it is important to note that the *Ruf*, the ‘call of conscience,’ reveals Dasein’s state of Being-guilty of *Verfallenheit*, as an uncritical adherent of the way of *Sein* of *das Man*.

It is also important to note that for Heidegger, the *Gewissenruf* has no content. The call does not call Dasein to a particular way of existence, as this would make the call primarily an ontic phenomenon. The call is a part of the ontological structure of Dasein, and as such, it must be ontically ‘empty.’ The call is a “calling-forth (and ‘-forward’) of Dasein into its ownmost possibilities” (BT, 318, translation modified; SZ, 278).⁵⁹ The possibilities to which the *Gewissenruf* summons Dasein are themselves determined by the particular historical-temporal situation in which Dasein finds itself as thrown; there is no possibility of something like a ‘transhistorical’ *Gewissenruf*. Instead, the form of the call takes priority over the content. Heidegger goes so far as to say that “[c]onscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent” (BT, 318, emphasis removed; SZ, 273). *Gewissen* has nothing concrete, i.e., ontic, to say about Dasein’s possibilities.

Given the above explanation, one could seemingly understand the *Ruf* in a very similar way to the religious understanding of God’s calling of human beings to righteousness. The Christian idea of a ‘call from without’ to the ‘true path for human beings’ seems, at first glance, to be coherent with Heidegger’s understanding of the *Ruf*. However, Heidegger is careful to distance himself from any theological connotations of his

⁵⁹ “...ein Vor-(nach-‘vorne’-) Rufen des Daseins in seine eigensten Möglichkeiten.”

investigation, as such connotations have no place in an ontological investigation. An ontological investigation differs in kind from “a theological exegesis of conscience or any employment of this phenomenon for proofs of God or for establishing an ‘immediate’ consciousness of God” (BT, 313; SZ, 269). Rather, for Heidegger, “[i]n conscience, Dasein calls itself” (BT, 320, emphasis removed; SZ, 275). In this way, one could see Heidegger’s analysis as radically anti-religious, for in a religious understanding of human beings ‘called to a higher purpose,’ the call would itself be ontic content that only has the pretence of appearing as a call from another being, namely God. Ontologically, however, the source of the call is Dasein itself.⁶⁰

Inadvertently showing the interdependence of the categories on which Strauss has chosen to focus, Heidegger connects *Gewissen* to *Angst*, *Unheimlichkeit*, and *Geworfenheit*:

[i]n the face of its thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] Dasein flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self. This fleeing has been described as a fleeing in the face of the uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] which is basically a determinative for individualized Being-in-the-world. Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the basic state-of-mind of anxiety [*Angst*], and, as the most elemental way in which thrown Dasein is disclosed, it puts Dasein’s Being-in-the-world face to face with the ‘nothing’ [*Nichts*] of the world; in the face of this ‘nothing,’ Dasein is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. (BT, 321; SZ, 276)

This critical passage indicates that the *Gewissenruf* shows Dasein its essential nullity to itself, thereby bringing it into the state of *Angst*, the fundamental mood or condition in which Dasein’s *Unheimlichkeit* appears and consequently permits Dasein to make *eigentlich* decisions. Heidegger states it plainly: “[t]he caller is Dasein in its uncanniness: primordial, thrown Being-in-the-world as the ‘not-at-home’—the bare ‘that-it-is’ in the ‘nothing’ of the world” (BT, 321; SZ, 276-277). Ontologically understood, there is no need

⁶⁰ Here we see evidence for Strauss’s assessment of the call of conscience in the Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

for a God who calls Dasein with an ‘alien voice’ (*fremde Stimme*), even if Dasein experiences the calls as such, as coming from a being wholly other to itself. The otherness of this other appears because of the absolute ontological distinction between authentic Dasein and *das Man*, or the Self and the They-self. Dasein calls itself because Dasein is most fundamentally *Sorge* at the basis of its Being. As such, Dasein is concerned with itself as a Self, as an *individual*, and calls itself out of *das Man* to itself. It appears that we cannot say whether it is possible for God to call Dasein to a life of righteousness, at least under the purview of fundamental phenomenological ontology. In sum, on the subject of the call of conscience, Heidegger distinguishes his thought at least from that of Christianity. Concerned as he is with ontology, Heidegger consigns the problem of religion to the ontic realm.⁶¹ However, present in Heidegger’s thought is the idea of a *revealing*, specifically Dasein’s revealing to itself its own essence in a way that evokes, rather than rationally displays. This idea, that any understanding of Dasein is fundamentally ungrounded and ungroundable, or that any such understanding is dependent on something other than itself, is at least possibly coherent with a religious conception of human existence.⁶²

It is possible to see this more clearly through an examination of guilt (*Schuld*), especially in its relation to the theological category of sin, which Heidegger addresses and

⁶¹ As a result “of its radicality, philosophical question is finally, methodologically atheistic” and “[t]he art is [therefore] to philosophize and still to be really religious” (John D. Caputo, “Heidegger’s *Kampf*: The Difficulty of Life,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 14, No.2 – Vol. 15, No. 1 (1991), 65). At first glance to the contrary, for John R. Williams, “Heidegger claims that his thinking is not atheistic or indifferent because it refuses to address itself to the problem of God; this is an area in which thinking as such has no consequence” (*Heidegger’s Philosophy of Religion* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1978), 96). To bring these two interpretations in line with each other, one must consider Heidegger’s methodology as atheistic (or at least agnostic), as the idea of religion is repeatedly consigned to the ontic realm, and is therefore not an object of ontological investigation. This is related to Heidegger’s conception of God as a *Seiende* rather than *Sein* itself.

⁶² “...if anything is inseparable from the idea of revelation, it is precisely this: man cannot reach an understanding of himself by his own means” (Gadamer, “Heidegger and Marburg Theology,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 205-206).

from which he distances his own thought. For Heidegger, the *Gewissenruf* essentially pronounces Dasein as guilty (*schuldig*), but not *schuldig* of this or that. Rather, ontologically speaking, Dasein is *schuldig* of ‘Being-the-basis of a nullity’ (*Grundsein einer Nichtigkeit*). Heidegger speaks of a *Nichtigkeit* here because both the thrownness and the projection of Dasein, understood essentially as its past and its future, respectively, are themselves grounded only in the factual existence of Dasein. Dasein is not thrown from or by something concrete, and it projects into the future without any ground upon which to base those projections. Dasein, as thrown and projecting, is responsible for itself, i.e., it is not able to shift responsibility for its choices to another ground or basis. Dasein is culpable to itself in being responsible to and for itself, and therefore Dasein is *schuldig*.

The state of Dasein being *schuldig* is directly related to the possibility that Dasein could realize its absolute freedom, in the sense of total lack of ground for making a particular ontic choice. As a *Grundsein einer Nichtigkeit*, Dasein is free to choose from amongst the locus of historical possibilities into which it has been thrown. Through the *Gewissenruf*’s revealing of Dasein’s *Schuld*, Dasein also realizes that any claims to authority, those which attempt to impose themselves without Dasein’s making them its *own* (*eigentlich*) choice, are only products of *das Man*. Heidegger states that “[t]he appeal [of *Gewissen*]...calls Dasein forth to the possibility of taking over, in existing, that thrown entity which it itself is; [as well,] it calls Dasein back to its thrownness so as to understand this thrownness as the null ground which it has to take up into existence” (BT, 333, translation modified, emphasis removed; SZ, 287).⁶³ The *Gewissenruf* thus reveals the guilt of Dasein’s thrownness, that Dasein is responsible for itself, and that the basis of Dasein’s

⁶³ “Der Anruf ist vorrufender Rückruf, *vor*: in die Möglichkeit, selbst das geworfene Seiende, das es *ist*, existierend zu übernehmen, *zurück*: in die Geworfenheit, um sie als den nichtigen Grund zu verstehen, den es in die Existenz aufzunehmen hat.”

choosing is most fundamentally *Nichtigkeit*. However, to be authentic, Dasein must take over this *Nichtigkeit* by making it Dasein's own.

Heidegger discusses *Schuld* and its relation to the theological category of sin in a footnote: “[t]he existential analysis of Being-guilty proves nothing either for or against the possibility of sin. Taken strictly, it cannot even be said that the ontology of Dasein of itself leaves this possibility open; for this ontology, as a philosophical inquiry, ‘knows’ in principle nothing about sin” (BT, 496, emphasis removed; SZ, 306 n.1). This is because sin is “a factual indebtedness of an utterly peculiar kind,” one which “has its own attestation...which remains closed off in principle from any philosophical experience” (BT, 496, SZ, 306 n.1). The experience of sin is closed off from philosophical experience because it would be particular ontic content of the ontological category of *Schuld* and, as such, must be left aside⁶⁴ when examining Dasein's ontological structure. In sin, humanity is indebted to God through being guilty of ‘original sin;’ philosophically speaking, however, Dasein, the being which human beings *are*, is indebted only to itself, due to the lack of ground, the *Nichtigkeit*, for determining its thrownness and projection. The category of sin may be applicable if one conducts an analysis of humanity from a theological perspective, but strictly philosophical speaking, it has no place in an ontological investigation of Dasein.

⁶⁴ Here we can see the early Heidegger's debt to Husserl and his conception of *epoche* as part of the process of transcendental phenomenology. Quentin Lauer describes the method: “[w]ith a view toward achieving pure phenomenality, the contingent is deliberately eliminated in the phenomenological *epoche*..., which simply leaves out of consideration, as philosophically (scientifically) irrelevant, any form of existential positing of that which appears, retaining only the appearance” (“Introduction” to Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 27). Heidegger understands Husserl's ‘existential positing’ to be the ontic content of the ontological structure of Dasein. However, much like Husserl, Heideggerian phenomenology must begin with *Seiendes* in order to understand their particular ontic instantiations as instantiations of (ontological) *Sein*.

Strauss's third category, what he calls 'being-unto-death,' which I assume to refer to the concept of 'Being-towards-death' (*Sein zum Tode*), will now be examined. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger understands the concept of death in the context of the entire structure of Dasein. As Heidegger says, "[i]n Dasein there is always something still outstanding, which, as a potentiality-for-Being of Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual'" (BT, 279, emphasis removed; SZ, 236). This is because "as long as Dasein *is* as an entity, it has never reached its wholeness" (BT, 280, Heidegger's emphasis; SZ, 236). However, it is not possible for Dasein both to be and to be whole: "if it gains such wholeness, this gain becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the-world" (BT, 280; SZ, 236). If Dasein is nothing other than its own possibilities, it can never be whole without in fact 'actualizing,' or making real, those possibilities, making them something other than possibilities and hence no longer essentially Dasein. If it is not possible for Dasein to project itself towards its own possibilities, Dasein is at an end. Such an end to Dasein is called *death*. Death in a very real sense individualizes Dasein, as only a particular Dasein may die for itself. Death is thus always Dasein's own (*eigen*): "[d]ying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all" (BT, 284; SZ, 240). Death is ahead of Dasein as the end of Dasein's temporal structure; it will be, but it is not yet. This means that Dasein's death is an essential part of Dasein itself, included within it from the start. As such, "as long as any Dasein is, it too is already its 'not-yet'" (BT, 288, emphasis removed; SZ, 244). Hence, Dasein is *geworfen* into dying, and begins to die the moment it begins to exist. Heidegger thus calls Dasein *Sein zum Ende*, or 'being-towards-the-end.' No matter what Dasein chooses from amongst its thrown possibilities, all choices ultimately end with the cessation of Dasein, the "possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein" (BT, 294; SZ, 250) which it cannot escape or avoid.

Further, as Dasein is *geworfen*, there is no ground or reason, phenomenologically speaking, either for Dasein's particular entrance into *Sein*, or for its exit from *Sein*.

Death is a critical structural element of Dasein in relation to its possibility of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), or its possibility of making its choices its own (*eigen*). Heidegger states that “[d]eath is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case” (BT, 294; SZ, 250). The recognition of this fact coupled with the fact of the essential arbitrariness of *Geworfenheit* causes *Angst*, and such “[a]nxiety in the face of death is anxiety ‘in the face of’ that potentiality-for-Being which is one’s ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped [*eigenste, unbezügliche und unüberholbare*]” (BT, 295; SZ, 251). As was discussed above, *Angst* is caused by Dasein’s recognition of its own character of *Sein*. Here, Heidegger says that “[t]hat in the face of which one has anxiety is Being-in-the-world itself. That about which one has this anxiety is simply Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being” (BT, 295; SZ, 251). Heidegger thus draws *Angst* and *Tod* together: *Angst*, the *Stimmung* which most clearly reveals Dasein’s way of *Sein*, is caused by Dasein’s recognition of its own mortality, and thus one can say in a very real sense that death ultimately uncovers Dasein’s way of *Sein*, and thus allows for Dasein to become *eigentlich*.

I will now discuss the connection between death and authenticity.⁶⁵ As was just mentioned, for Heidegger it is possible for Dasein to take over (*übernehmen*) its own death, thereby recognizing that death is such only for a particular Dasein. Death thus *individualizes* Dasein, making it clear that each Dasein is a particular instantiation of Being-in-the-world. Dasein, as thrown, always already has a particular locus of choices,

⁶⁵ See my discussion in chapter 1 of this thesis about Strauss’s reference to Meyer’s novella, *The Tempting of Pescara*, as a literary case study of the relation between death and authenticity.

temporally-historically determined, from which it may choose. We can say further that Dasein is, most fundamentally, nothing other than its own possibilities, or its own locus of ‘not-yets.’ However, “[i]n Dasein, as an entity ‘towards its death,’ its own uttermost ‘not-yet’ has always already been included—that ‘not-yet’ which all others lie ahead of” (BT, 303, translation modified; SZ, 259).⁶⁶ Death is the most radical possibility for every Dasein. To acknowledge this aspect of Dasein’s *Sein* is to anticipate (*vorlaufen*) it, to ‘run ahead’ to Dasein’s end and, in such acknowledgement, to allow that end to inform or condition all choices Dasein may make. Anticipation is “to comport ourselves towards death [in such a way] that in this Being, and for it, death reveals itself as a possibility” (BT, 306, emphasis removed; SZ, 262). Anticipation reveals to Dasein that no matter which choice it makes, all will end in the death of Dasein, the cessation of *in-der-Welt-Sein*. Rather than anticipation causing Dasein to succumb to a feeling of the ultimate meaninglessness of its choices, Heidegger claims that “[a]nticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one’s ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of authentic existence” (BT, 307; SZ, 263).

To sum up, it is through anxious anticipation that Dasein takes over its own death, thus allowing it make *eigentlich* choices. Heidegger summarizes thusly:

[b]ut the state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself face to face with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of its existence...Anticipation utterly individualizes Dasein, and allows it, in this individualization of itself, to become certain of the totality of its potentiality-for-Being...Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety. (BT, 310, emphasis removed; SZ, 265-266)

⁶⁶ “In das Dasein, als das zu seinem Tode seiende, ist das äußerste Nochnicht seiner selbst, dem alle anderen vorgelagert sind, immer schon einbezogen.”

Heidegger finally posits his notion of authentic *Sein zum Tode*, claiming that anticipation results in Dasein's 'freedom towards death' (*Freiheit zum Tode*) through revealing Dasein's 'lostness in the they-self' (*Verlorenheit in das Man-selbst*), i.e., its inauthentic way of Being. In this way, then, the anxious anticipation of death allows for the free, authentic taking over of Dasein's choices, and shows to Dasein its historical-temporal *geworfen* character, thereby revealing its way of *Sein* to itself.⁶⁷ In *History of the Concept of Time*, based on lectures given two years before the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger makes the point explicitly:

[t]his certainty, that 'I myself am in that I will die,' is *the basic certainty of Dasein itself*. It is a genuine statement of Dasein, while *cogito sum* is only the semblance of such a statement. If such pointed formulations mean anything at all, then the appropriate statement pertaining to Dasein in its being would have to be *sum moribundus* ('I am in dying'), *moribundus* not as someone gravely ill or wounded, but insofar as I am, I am *moribundus*. *The moribundus first gives the sum its sense.* (HCT, 316-317, Heidegger's emphasis)

It is now possible to understand fully the relation between the four categories of *Sein und Zeit* that Strauss singles out for critique. *Angst* both reveals the *Nichtigkeit* at the basis of Dasein, and how all possibilities from which Dasein may choose end in the death or cessation of Dasein—understood fundamentally as *Sein-zum-Tode*. Even given this *Nichtigkeit* at the basis of Dasein, *Gewissen* calls to Dasein that Dasein is responsible for this *Nichtigkeit* as Dasein's *eigen*, as Dasein is fundamentally *Sorge* for itself. Dasein is thus *schuldig* or culpable to itself to take responsibility for itself. Strauss's focus on these four categories allows us to draw a parallel with a 'theological' or 'religious' interpretation

⁶⁷ At this point, we are better prepared to understand Strauss's curious comment concerning Heidegger, "Death=God" and the subsequent references to Meyer's *Die Versuchung des Pescara*, discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis. Ultimately, it is Dasein's understanding of its own death that allows it to make an authentic decision concerning its own possibilities, thus granting those possibilities meaning, more meaning than Dasein alone can grant them (as Dasein is *immer schon verfallen*). Death ultimately reveals Dasein's finitude, and it is this finitude which gives meaning to all that Dasein accomplishes. For John R. Williams, "[t]he fact that we are going to die makes us realize that we are not the source of our own Being, but rather that we depend for our very existence on something external to us" (*Martin Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion*, 128).

of human existence: we are guilty in the eyes of God, and our conscience tells us to take responsibility for ourselves in order to live as God intended humans to live, understanding that both our entry into and our exit from existence are dependent on a power fundamentally ‘other’ to human beings. It seems that Strauss selected these categories to emphasize the religious character of Heidegger’s thought, i.e., to emphasize how Heidegger adopts the structural concepts of a religious understanding of human existence.⁶⁸ However, in Heidegger’s structure, God is replaced by *das Nichts*, which disallows an interpretation of Heidegger’s thought in accordance with Christianity as it is ordinarily understood. For the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, ontology is strictly agnostic. But, here is precisely the problem: for Strauss, philosophy must make a decision concerning the status of the divine. More precisely, for Strauss, philosophy, or more precisely the philosophical life, is inherently atheistic.⁶⁹ Thus, Heidegger seems not to have sufficiently clarified his position vis-à-vis religion. Although abandoning any notion of eternity concomitant with faith in God as understood by Christianity,⁷⁰ Heidegger’s thought as expressed in *Sein und Zeit* has

⁶⁸ Again showing the agreement between his interpretation and Strauss’s, Löwith writes: “Heidegger’s entanglement of death, guilt, and conscience in a Dasein responsible for itself alone, uproots those concepts from their Christian source, but for that very reason they are dependent on that origin” (Nature, History, and Existentialism *and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 68). This critique finds echoes in statements made by Nietzsche (‘modernity as secularized Christianity’) and Schmitt (‘modern political concepts as secularized theological ones’). Interestingly, Marlène Zarader notes Heidegger’s dependence on Hebraic sources rather than Christian ones: Heidegger “evacuate[s] the entire ethical dimension of the Bible,” and at the same time “take[s] up an essence or structures, which were originally those of the Bible” (*The Unthought Debt: Martin Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 51). If we follow Strauss’s interpretation of the principle element of Jewish revelation as revelation of the Law, it is uncertain what is left for Heidegger if we follow Zarader’s interpretation of him. I cannot pursue elaboration of this issue here, however.

⁶⁹ To quote a critical passage from NRH, one which exemplifies Strauss’s notion of philosophy as a way of life in distinction to that of a religious believer (and thus differing from Heidegger’s notion of the distinction, to be discussed below), “[t]he fundamental question, therefore, is whether men can acquire that knowledge of the good without which they cannot guide their lives individually or collectively by the unaided efforts of their natural powers, or whether they are dependent for that knowledge on Divine Revelation. No alternative is more fundamental than this: human guidance or divine guidance” (74).

⁷⁰ See my discussion in chapter 1 of this thesis concerning letters from Strauss to Löwith, specifically in “Correspondence Concerning Modernity,” 107 (GS 3, 662) and from Strauss to Voegelin, specifically in FPP, 75.

not sufficiently freed itself from a fundamentally religious understanding of human existence as it remains neutral concerning the question of the existence of God, a question that, for Strauss, philosophy must always ask, thereby signifying the inherent atheism of the philosophical life.⁷¹

Heidegger seems to hold this to be the case, however. In Heidegger's lecture of 1928, "Phenomenologie und Theologie," he claims philosophy and theology to be fundamentally different. I will now examine this lecture to see how Heidegger conceives of this difference. Heidegger understands the relation between philosophy and theology, not as "a struggle between two worldviews," but as "the relationship of two sciences" (PM, 40; GA 9, 47). Heidegger defines science as "the founding disclosure, for the sheer sake of disclosure, of a self-contained region of beings, or of being" (PM, 41; GA 9, 48). This means that any science has, examined or not, a particular way of conceiving the beings which it investigates, and those beings are disclosed, i.e., they *are*,⁷² in accordance with the way in which the particular science reveals them. As the just-quoted sentence indicates, Heidegger acknowledges the ontological difference here, for there is one ontological science concerned with the investigation of *Sein*, philosophy or 'fundamental ontology,' and many ontic or 'positive' sciences concerned with the investigation of *Seiendes*. The positive sciences' "characteristic feature lies in the fact that the objectification of whatever it is that they thematize is oriented directly toward beings, as a continuation of an already existing prescientific attitude toward such beings" (PM, 41; GA 9, 48). Ontic sciences do

⁷¹ It is also important to consider Strauss's understanding of the theologico-political problem, thereby indicating how a life guided by philosophy is ultimately in opposition lives guided by either religion or politics. I discuss this issue further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁷² Ontological research 'lays the foundations for the sciences,' "in the sense that it leaps ahead, as it were, into some area of Being, discloses it for the first time in the constitution of its Being, and, after thus arriving at the structures within it, makes these available to the positive sciences as transparent assignments for their inquiry" (BT, 30-31; SZ, 10). Sciences thus disclose their objects of research in accordance with the previous ontological 'leaping ahead.'

not investigate this ‘prescientific attitude,’ which, from our reading of *Sein und Zeit*, we know is such sciences’ respective unexamined meanings of *Sein*.⁷³ Heidegger includes theology among the positive sciences, and thus theology is concerned with ontic *Seiendes* and is fundamentally different from philosophy, the ontological discipline. Theology, for Heidegger, “is in principle closer to mathematics or chemistry than to philosophy” (PM, 41; GA 9, 49).

We see that Heidegger distinguishes philosophy and theology in accordance with the ontological difference elaborated in *Sein und Zeit*, rather than in accordance with what he calls the “popular view,” namely that

each of the sciences..., to a certain extent, has as its theme the same area: human life and the world. But they are guided by different points of view. The one proceeds from the principle of *faith*, the other from the principle of *reason*. (PM, 41; GA 9, 49)

More precisely, Heidegger conceives human life to be, most fundamentally, an instantiation of Dasein, and thus he attempts to formalize what he believes to be common to all human lives no matter what their particular content, namely the ontological structure of Dasein.⁷⁴

For Heidegger, the positive character of theology is indicated by “what is given” for it, namely its “Christianness” (PM, 43; GA 9, 52.). Theology is determined as a science by *Christlichkeit*, the particular *Seiende* which theology investigates, while at the same time *Christlichkeit* is revealed as such by theology. This co-determinative relationship exists because, according to Heidegger, the *Seiendes* of a positive science’s investigation are “in

⁷³ “Scientific research accomplishes, roughly and naïvely, the demarcation and initial fixing of the areas of subject matter. The basic structures of any such area have already been worked out after a fashion in our prescientific ways of experience and interpretation that domain of Being in which the area of subject-matter is itself confined” (BT, 29; SZ, 9). Immediately following this statement, Heidegger lists a number of ontic sciences, *including theology*.

⁷⁴ Caputo notes that for the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, both Christian and Greek ways of living “represented ‘existentiell ideals’ from which the existential analytic prescinded, of which the existential analytic represented an ontological formalization” (“Heidegger and Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 274).

some way...already disclosed,” and are “come upon in a definite prescientific manner” (PM, 42; GA 9, 50). In a statement familiar to readers of *Sein und Zeit*, each particular scientific investigation is “already illuminated and guided by an understanding of being—even if it be nonconceptual” (PM, 42; GA 9, 50). Positive sciences function in such a way that the meaning of the *Sein* of their respective *Seiendes* is not necessarily understood, or even investigated. Under this understanding, we can conclude that Heidegger believes theology to have at its basis an unexamined understanding of the *Sein* of *Christlichkeit*, and it is the task of philosophy to examine the meaning of this *Sein*. Strauss, in turn, understands a claim based on revelation to have a particular understanding of being, namely that to be is to be created. The answer to the question of something’s nature is not asked, because to ask this question is to begin to philosophize rather than to obey piously the law or code which follows from revelation.⁷⁵ I will briefly return to this topic below.

Christlichkeit is characterized most fundamentally by belief or faith [*Glauben*] in Christ’s appearance and, according to Heidegger, “theology is a conceptual knowing” (PM, 43; GA 9, 52) of this faith. Christ is understood as “that being which is primarily revealed to faith, and only to it, and which, as revelation, first gives rise to faith” (PM, 44; GA 9, 52). Through faith, an individual’s existence (*Dasein*) is placed before God and essentially understood as in relation to God, and is thus born again. Heidegger claims that “faith=rebirth,” and that this is “the proper [*eigentliche*] existentiell meaning of faith” (PM, 44, emphasis removed; GA 9, 53). Using the language of *Sein und Zeit* here, Heidegger

⁷⁵ “...philosophy cannot emerge, or nature cannot be discovered, if authority as such is not doubted” (Strauss, NRH, 84). Compare this with Heidegger: “[a]nyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question ‘Why are there essents [*Seiendes*] rather than nothing?’ even before it is asked: everything that is, except God himself, has been created by Him...[t]o philosophize is *to ask*, ‘why are there essents rather than nothing?’” (IM, 6-7, my emphasis; GA 40, 9-10). Sikka notes that Heidegger’s question is, “from the standpoint of faith[,]. . .foolishness” (*Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology*, 270).

notes that a particular Dasein's experience of faith, even one as radical as Dasein's rebirth as a child of God, is itself an ontico-existential event, not a fundamental change in the ontologico-existential structure of Dasein itself.⁷⁶ All human beings, each of whom as such instantiates Dasein in the world, are understood as existentially the same, that is, are understood as possessing Dasein's categorical structure whether a believer or an unbeliever.

How, then, does Heidegger fundamentally conceive of the relation between philosophy and theology? Philosophy, primarily ontology for Heidegger, "is the formally indicative ontological corrective of the ontic, and in particular, of the pre-Christian, content of basic theological concepts" (PM, 52; GA 9, 65).⁷⁷ Both philosophy and theology are sciences and as such they conceptualize their respective domains of investigation, *Sein* and *Christlichkeit*. However, Heidegger understands an investigation of *Christlichkeit*, which is conceived to be particular and hence ontic, to include implicitly an investigation of the existential structure of Dasein along with it, as Christian Dasein is still Dasein most fundamentally. Thus, for Heidegger philosophy and theology are not fundamentally in conflict at the ontological level. Philosophy can help to make clear the aspects of *Christlichkeit* that theology, as a positive science, cannot conceptualize due to theology's

⁷⁶ Heidegger's use of '*eigentliche*' is most likely meant to follow the use of this term in *Sein und Zeit*. One could say, then, that the ontic rebirth in faith allows the particular, faithful Dasein to make an authentic decision concerning its existence in light of the ultimate withdrawal of Dasein from *Sein*, instantiated by death. Dasein's ontological structure still persists, however.

⁷⁷ Heidegger understands the 'formal indication' to point to the distinction between the form and content of a given phenomenon, and thus to prevent phenomenological analysis from straying into an attempt to formalize the content. Hence, the 'formal indication' indicates what is to be disregarded for the purposes of phenomenology. See Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 44. In "Heidegger's Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications," Dahlstrom believes Heidegger's conception of the 'formal indication' to be "appropriated from what he understands by Christian theology" (776), and that the essence of the 'formal indication' is that it "points in the direction of something that must be performed or gone through" (782). This alludes to the idea that formal indications "signal a reversal and a transformation," (793) implicit due to "both philosophy and theology [assuming] the 'fallenness' of human existence" (793). In other words, for a theological perspective (and one derived, it must be acknowledge, from the *Beiträge*), "Heidegger 'gives a sign,' or a hint of how theology is now possible and of the basic tasks which now lie before it" (Prudhomme, "The Passing-By of the Ultimate God," 453-454).

uninvestigated assumption of the prescientific aspects of *Christlichkeit*.⁷⁸ There is a conflict, however, between faith and reason as ‘forms of existence,’ or ‘existentiell possibilities of Dasein.’ In a remarkable statement, Heidegger claims that faith “is so absolutely the mortal enemy [*Todfeind*] that philosophy does not even begin to want in any way to do battle with it” (PM, 53; GA 9, 66). This is because the form of existence of the faithful individual is, according to Heidegger, in conflict with that of the philosopher. Heidegger quotes Luther, who held that “‘faith is permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see.’”⁷⁹ This seizure is, for the faithful individual, permanent and hence in conflict with the “form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy and that is factually ever-changing” (PM, 53, emphasis removed; GA 9, 66). However, this conflict only appears at the ontic level, which Heidegger seems to equate here with the practical level due to his contrasting the life of faithfulness with that of “free appropriation of one’s whole Dasein” (PM, 53; GA 9, 66). The conflict does not exist at the ontological or theoretical level. Theoretically, philosophy can be of aid to theology; practically, the philosophical life is utterly opposed to the religious life. Heidegger says that the conflict “must bear the possibility of a community of the sciences of theology and philosophy” (PM, 53, emphasis removed; GA 9, 66), that the two sciences must be co-responsive in the

⁷⁸ See Heidegger’s analysis (PM, 51-52; GA 9, 64) of the basis of sin, a theological concept, being found in guilt, a particular existential aspect of Dasein and hence a philosophical concept. It is important to note that “it is not a matter of ‘deducing’ sin from guilt, but rather of receiving conceptual help and direction—or rather, ‘codirection’ and ‘correction’—from ontology” (Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 174. It is also important to note again that in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger says that “[t]he existential analysis of Being-guilty proves nothing either *for* or *against* the possibility of sin. Taken strictly, it cannot even be said that the ontology of Dasein *of itself* leaves this possibility open; for this ontology, as a philosophical inquiry, ‘knows’ in principle nothing about sin” (BT, 496, emphasis in original; SZ, 306, n. 1).

⁷⁹ Martin Luther, *Werke*, Vol. 46, 287, quoted in PM, 44; “‘*Glaube ist das Sichgefangengeben in den Sachen die wir nicht sehen*,’” GA 9, 52. It is important to note that the German word *Sichgefangengeben* is directly related to the words used for ‘to capture’ (*fangen*) and ‘imprisoned’ (*gefangen*). Karsten Harries emphasizes this by translating Luther’s quoted remark as “‘faith is making oneself a prisoner in the things we do not see’” (Harries, “The Descent of the *Logos*: Limits of Transcendental Reflection,” in *Transcendental Heidegger*, 80).

sense that philosophy may work as a formal corrective for theology. At this point in his career, however, Heidegger holds that faith and reason are two different ontic possibilities for Dasein and are incommensurable: “there is no such thing as a Christian philosophy; that is an absolute ‘squared circle’ [‘*hölzernes Eisen*’]” (PM, 53; GA 9, 66).⁸⁰ Heidegger thus appears, at least at the time immediately following *Sein und Zeit*, to make a clear distinction between philosophy and theology, understood in the Christian sense.

Strauss also makes reference to the later Heidegger’s more ‘meditative’ stance towards *Sein*, claiming such a stance to be similar to a religious eschatology, without the *hope* inherent in any religious eschatology; for Strauss’s Heidegger, ‘hope has been replaced by thinking.’ I understand such an eschatology to be something like an anticipation and description of the prophesized ‘end times,’ those which purportedly signal the redemption of human beings, e.g., the revelation of John in the Bible. By contrast, for Heidegger, as Strauss notes, there is no possibility of redemption as there is no ‘other world’ to which human beings will go or return. Heidegger’s later position, from Strauss’s perspective, continues to be seemingly agnostic and at the same time religious in character. Heidegger’s later turn to a more poetic understanding of human beings in the world, contrasted with the rigorous phenomenological approach of *Sein und Zeit*, is evident when one looks to an indicative sampling of his later works. I will now examine several of those works, including the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, “Die Kehre,” *Gelassenheit*, and the posthumous *Der Spiegel* interview. The passages from these works have been chosen both

⁸⁰ Literally, Heidegger calls any conception of ‘Christian philosophy’ a “wooden iron” (*hölzernes Eisen*) i.e., an impossibility. He uses exactly the same metaphor to describe ‘Christian philosophy’ in *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (GA 40, 9). Although Strauss does not use the same idiomatic expression, this statement indicates a point on which Heidegger and Strauss agree. Cf. NRH, 74, where Strauss discusses the absolute opposition between the rational and the divine as sources of knowledge. For Strauss, however, Heidegger does not go far enough in making the distinction between philosophy and religion, reason and revelation, Athens and Jerusalem clear.

as exemplary of Heidegger's position at various points in his later career, and as exemplary of Heidegger's notions of 'god' and 'religion/religiosity.'⁸¹

The *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* was composed around 1936, but only published as part of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* in 1989. It has been claimed by some interpreters⁸² that this book is Heidegger's second great work after *Sein und Zeit*, as much of the language is novel for this moment in Heidegger's corpus and seems to serve as the basis for much of what is considered to be the post-*Kehre* writings. In the *Beiträge*, Heidegger has all but abandoned the rigorous categorical language of *Sein und Zeit*;⁸³ however, the question which *Sein und Zeit* attempted to answer, 'what is the meaning of Being?', remains the main subject of discussion here and, arguably, throughout the remainder of Heidegger's corpus. I will only examine some passages near the end of the book, ones which specifically involve religious language, although, as I hope to show, this language does not refer to 'religion' in any ordinary sense.

⁸¹ I understand that such a criterion is tentative at best, and hence any conclusions I reach through my interpretation of the following passages are themselves just as tentative. However, I posit this criterion simply to reduce the monumental task of sifting through the entirety of Heidegger's writings. In the proceeding paragraphs, I hope to follow one of Heidegger's own hermeneutic principles, namely that "[e]very thinker thinks only one thought" (*What is Called Thinking?*, 50).

⁸² For example, Fred Dallmayr considers the *Beiträge* to be "the magnum opus of Heidegger's mature years" (*The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 55). In certainly a more critical fashion, Tom Rockmore calls the *Beiträge* "[t]he single most important text for the relation between Heidegger's later position and his Nazism" (*On Heidegger's Philosophy and Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 176). As it falls outside the scope of this chapter, I will not pursue the question of Heidegger's politics in relation to the *Beiträge* here; however, it should be clear from many points in chapter 1 of this thesis that Strauss considers the relation between Heidegger's philosophical position and his politics to be of critical importance.

⁸³ Jeff Owen Prudhomme notes the problem inherent in the language of the *Beiträge*: "the problem with [a 'mytho-poietic' discourse like that which is found in the *Beiträge*] is that it does not offer a clear second language with which to interpret the poetic language of the gods" ("The Passing-By of the Ultimate God: The Theological Assessment of Modernity in Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 453). This passage indicates the *practical* problem inherent in Heidegger's later philosophy, for according to it all that is to be done is prepare the ground for the arrival of a new epoch, determined by a sending, and thereby novel understanding, of *Sein*. Heidegger's language is not translatable into the language of everyday practical, not to say political, life. We are reminded here of Strauss's critique, that philosophy is replaced by "listening with reverence to the incipient *mythoi*" (WIPP, 246).

Late in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger claims that “[o]ur hour is the epoch of going-under [Untergang]” (CP, 278, emphasis removed; GA 65, 397). Qualifying his Spenglerian language concerning the modern era, Heidegger says that “[t]aken in its essential sense, going-under means going along the path of the reticent preparation for those who are to come, for the moment, and for the site, in all of which the decision of the arrival and the absence of gods falls” (CP, 278, translation modified; GA 65, 397).⁸⁴ This passage, apocalyptic in tone and typical of much of Heidegger’s work post-*Einführung in die Metaphysik*, is vague to say the least. I will now attempt to explain the passage, with the hope that this explanation will reveal some meaning in the other passages to be discussed forthwith. Heidegger names ‘our’ epoch, the epoch of the 20th century, as the epoch of ‘going-under.’ In the *Einführung*, Heidegger characterizes our time as that of “the darkening of the world” and “the flight of the gods” (IM, 38; GA 40, 41).⁸⁵ Heidegger suggests that in such a time, it is necessary to prepare for the arrival of ‘those who are to come,’ the futural thinkers who represent instantiations of what Heidegger names ‘the other thinking:’ “[o]nly the great and unrevealed individuals will create the silence for the passing of the god and among themselves for the secret accord of the prepared ones” (CP, 291, translation modified; GA 65, 414).⁸⁶ It is also necessary to prepare for the ‘moment’ and ‘site,’ or time and space, in which the ‘decision’ occurs concerning the arrival or

⁸⁴ “Unter-gang, im wesentlichen Sinne gemeint, ist der Gang zur verschwiegenen Bereitung des Künftigen, des Augenblicks und der Stätte, in denen die Entscheidung über Ankunft und Ausbleib der Götter fällt.”

⁸⁵ “[T]he religious’ is never destroyed by logic; it is always destroyed only by the god’s withdrawal,” WT, 10, translation modified (“[d]as Religiöse wird niemals durch die Logik zerstört, sondern immer nur dadurch, daß der Gott sich entzieht,” WD, 7).

⁸⁶ “Nur die großen und verborgenen Einzelnen werden dem Vorbeigang des Gottes die Stille schaffen und unter sich den verschwiegenen Einklang der Bereiten.” We find an echo of this eschatological idea in Heidegger’s statement at the end of his single television interview, conducted by Richard Wisser for the German network ZDF in September 1969: “[a] coming thinker, who will perhaps be faced with the task of really taking over this thinking that I am attempting to *prepare*, will have to obey a sentence Heinrich von Kleist once wrote, and that reads ‘I step back before the one who is not yet here, and bow, a millennium before him, to his spirit’” (in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, eds. Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 87).

absence of the gods. Heidegger does not say here that human beings decide for this arrival or absence; rather, a decision is made (by...?), outside of human control. All that can be done is preparation, consisting of waiting for the thinkers to come and holding open the possibility of the return of the gods.

It seems from this passage that Heidegger is endorsing a monastic style of comportment, one which discourages activity and encourages passive acceptance. However, this is not necessarily the case, for “those who go-under are the ones who always question” (CP, 278, translation modified; GA 65, 397).⁸⁷ This comment is echoed in the final lines of “Die Frage nach dem Technik,” which says that “questioning is the piety of thinking [*das Fragen ist die Frömmigkeit des Denkens*]” (GA 7, 36, my translation). For Heidegger, questioning is piety in the sense that to question (we can assume Heidegger believes ‘concerning the meaning of Being’) is to act piously toward thinking, to treat *Denken* in its particular Heideggerian sense with a quasi-religious reverence. Heidegger has an idea of ‘questioning’ very different from what is understood to be philosophical questioning in Strauss’s sense, however. Further, it is each thinker’s respective ‘first’ or ‘highest’ question for philosophical examination that proves to be evidence of a deep fissure, as well as a close relation, between their respective projects.⁸⁸

I will now discuss what Heidegger here means by ‘god,’ through an examination of certain passages of the section from the *Beiträge* entitled ‘The Last God’ (*Der letzte Gott*). Under this title, Heidegger notes the different conception of ‘god’ he intends here, namely “[t]he totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God” (CP, 283; GA 65, 403). By this passage, we can understand ‘god’ to mean something

⁸⁷ “Die Unter-gehenden sind die immer Fragenden.”

⁸⁸ I examine this subject further in chapter 3 of this thesis.

that comes from out of the future, as it is something that has not yet existed in relation to human beings, something wholly other and unaccountable. This ‘god,’ or more specifically *faith* in this ‘god,’ is independent of tradition, emphasized by Heidegger to be therefore irreconcilable with the Christian God. Heidegger’s conception of ‘religion,’ then, if we mean by that a set of practices undertaken in order to live piously, must come from out of the future, not from out of the past. The concept of religious tradition, specifically the practices handed down through and thereby expressions of piety or fidelity to a past revelation—crucial for any religion as we commonly understand the concept—seems to be rejected *tout court*. Heidegger indicates this by stating that this god “stands outside those calculating determinations meant by titles such as ‘mono-theism,’ ‘pan-theism,’ and ‘a-theism’” (CP, 289; GA 65, 411). Such concepts “exist only since Judeo-Christian ‘apologetics,’ which has metaphysics as its intellectual presupposition,” and, most importantly, “[w]ith the death of this god, all theisms collapse” (CP, 289; GA 65, 411). Heidegger’s tone is apocalyptic, eschatological, but not ‘religious’ in the way the term is commonly understood, fundamentally derived as it is from *tradition*. As Strauss says, for Heidegger “hope is replaced by thinking” (“Preface,” 11), and this change proves to widen the gap between Heidegger’s thought and ‘religious’ thought based in the Bible.

For Heidegger, “[t]he last god is not the end but the other beginning of immeasurable possibilities for our history. For its sake, history up to now should not terminate but rather must be brought to an end” (CP, 289; GA 65, 411). It is unclear what Heidegger means by this ambiguous sentence. Does he say that we should be active in forcing the arrival of the ‘other beginning?’ If this is the case, the sentence indicates a practical element of the later Heidegger’s thinking. Leaving off this topic for now, we see that Heidegger suggests the way in which ‘history will be brought to an end:’

“[p]reparation for the appearing of the last god is the utmost venture of the truth of being [*Sein*], by virtue of which man alone succeeds in restoring beings” (CP, 289, translation modified; GA 65, 411).⁸⁹ For Heidegger, the task of philosophy is preparation for the arrival of ‘the last god,’ a new dispensation of *Sein* and hence a new way of understanding *Seiendes*.⁹⁰

Much of Heidegger’s work post-*Beiträge* can be seen as based on or derived from the ideas first discussed there, from the lecture “Die Kehre,” first given in 1949, all the way to Heidegger’s final interview published in 1976 in *Der Spiegel*. However, in “Die Kehre,” Heidegger indicates a specific notion of God as distinct from *Sein*: “[w]hether the god lives or remains dead is not decided by the religiosity of men and even less by the theological aspirations of philosophy and natural science. Whether or not God is God comes disclosingly to pass [*ereignet sich*] from out of and within the constellation of Being [*der Konstellation des Seyns*]” (QCT, 49; GA 79, 77). Heidegger here indicates his following of Nietzsche and perhaps also Weber, in the sense that in the ‘disenchanted’ age of science and technology, the possibility of God’s existence is eliminated. It is up to the deigning of *Sein* to determine whether God or the gods will return. The task of philosophy, meanwhile,

⁸⁹ “Die Vorbereitung des Erscheinens des letzten Gottes ist das äußerste Wagnis der Wahrheit des Seyns, kraft deren allein die Wiederbringung des Seienden dem Menschen glückt.”

⁹⁰ Echoing aspects of *Sein und Zeit*, in the context of the *Beiträge* the *future* and our comportment towards it serve as the source of meaning for human beings. Gadamer identifies Heidegger’s conception of “the essentially futural character of Dasein” (*Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 204), which we may then usefully compare with what “Heidegger recognized in Paul’s account of the return of Christ, which is neither a second coming to be expected nor is it, as *parousia*, a being present one day; rather, it is strictly a *coming*” (“The Religious Dimension in Heidegger,” 201, my emphasis). The problem for the Christian theologian, however, becomes how to take into account a God that, in Heidegger’s terms, is itself conditioned by temporality (and hence will elude application of terms like ‘eternal’). For Frederick Sontag, “if Being is first understood in terms of temporality, it will be difficult if not impossible later on to interpret God’s being in any other terms” (“Heidegger, Time, and God,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (October 1967), 281). Finally, this being said, it is arguable, as Daniel O. Dahlstrom believes, that the Christian revelation is “thoroughly historical (*geschichtlich*), not only in the sense that it in fact originally happened, but above all in the sense that it continues to happen (*immer noch geschieht*)” (“Heidegger’s Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications,” *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 47 (June 1994), 791).

is, as was mentioned above, to prepare for such an arrival. In *Gelassenheit*, a book composed of a memorial address for the composer Conrad Kreutzer given in 1955 and a conversation between a ‘scientist,’ a ‘teacher,’ and a ‘scholar’ purportedly from 1944, Heidegger elaborates the method by which preparation for the last god’s arrival may be undertaken. The method is by thinking (*Denken*), but thinking of a special variety. In *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger contrasts two kinds of thinking, calculative (*rechnende*) and meditative (*besinnliche*). Calculative thinking

computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never arrives at reflection. (*Discourse on Thinking*,⁹¹ 46, translation modified; GA 16, 519-520)⁹²

Meditative thinking, on the other hand, is that thinking “which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is” (*Discourse on Thinking*, 46; GA 16, 520). Heidegger characterizes *besinnliches Denken* with two complementary ways of human comportment: “releasement towards things” and “openness to the mystery” (*Discourse on Thinking*, 54-55; GA 16, 527-528). For Heidegger, these two ways “belong together,” and “they promise us a new ground and foundation [*neuen Grund und Boden*] upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperilled by it” (*Discourse on Thinking*, 55; GA 16, 528).⁹³

The second published part of *Gelassenheit* elaborates in greater, albeit still vague, detail what the two aforementioned ways of comportment consist of. As the second part is a conversation, interpretation is made more difficult. I hold the particular hermeneutic

⁹¹ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

⁹² “...kalkuliert. Es kalkuliert mit fortgesetzt neuen, mit immer aussuchtsreicheren end zugleich billigeren Möglichkeiten. Das rechnende Denken hetzt von einer Chance zur nächsten. Das rechnende Denken halt nie still, kommt nicht zur Besinnung.”

⁹³ Heidegger calls this new *Grund* a “neue Bodenständigkeit” (GA 16, 528); see Strauss’s discussion of Heidegger’s conception of *Bodenständigkeit* in SPPP, 33, addressed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

principle that what the character named ‘Teacher’ states is intended to be Heidegger’s own belief or idea that he wishes to endorse, in contrast to those of the ‘Scientist’ and the ‘Scholar.’ In the “Conversation on a Country Path,” the Teacher says that “[w]e must not do, [but] rather wait” (GA 13, 42, my translation).⁹⁴ It is not identified what we are to wait for, as we cannot see beyond the horizon of *Sein* to look for what it will send to us from out of itself. As the Teacher states, “[i]n waiting we leave open that for which we are waiting” (GA 13, 49, my translation),⁹⁵ with the purpose of allowing a novel sending of Being to reveal itself without our preconceptions affecting our understanding of it. Heidegger does not elaborate further either here or in later works, and in fact, as we shall see in examining Heidegger’s final interview, it is evident that he could not predict the outcome of the present epoch.

Heidegger’s *Der Spiegel* interview, conducted in 1966 but only published in 1976 after his death, reveals a more candid opinion concerning religion and God, albeit firmly grounded in the claims of the previously-examined works, especially the *Beiträge*. In this interview, Heidegger contrasts ‘scientific’ or ‘technological’ philosophy, that which he sees as being the current state of philosophical discourse, and the ‘other thinking’ (*das andere Denken*) (“Only a God Can Save Us,” 109;⁹⁶ GA 16, 674). *Das andere Denken*, as was elaborated in *Gelassenheit*, is characterized by the thinker as “the pious one who keeps himself open” (“Only a God Can Save Us,” 108; GA 16, 674.). *Offenhältlich* comportment consists of “preparation of the readiness, of keeping oneself open of the arrival of or the absence of the god” (“Only a God Can Save Us,” 108; GA 16, 673). In perhaps his most

⁹⁴ “Wir sollen nichts tun, sondern warten.”

⁹⁵ “Im Warten lassen wir das, vorauf wir warten, offen.”

⁹⁶ In Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993).

candid remark concerning the future of humanity in relation to divinity on Earth, and thus a political statement as well, Heidegger says that

philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavour. Only a god can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, though thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of going-under; for in the face of the absent god, we do not, vulgarly said, 'snuff out,' but rather, we go under. ("Only a God Can Save Us," 107, translation modified; GA 16, 671)⁹⁷

Here we see that Heidegger's thinking near the end of his career is based on that of the *Beiträge*, and is expressed to the *Der Spiegel* interviewer using much of the same language. The decision as to the direction which humanity may take in relation to *Sein* is not made by humanity itself, but by *Sein*. The decision is fundamentally concerned with the sending and arrival of the 'last god' from out of the 'realm' of *Sein*, or the absence of this god and humanity's subsequent *Untergang*. According to Heidegger, human beings must adopt the stance of *Gelassenheit* in order to prepare the ground for the possible arrival or absence of the new god, that is, the arrival of a new relation to *Sein* from out of *Sein* itself, or else risk propagating the technological way of comportment to beings and thus the meaning of *Sein* as the product of *töcni* characterized by *Vorhandenheit*. This position, already found in the *Beiträge*, could hardly be called Christian or 'religious' in any Western-theological sense. Much has been made of Heidegger's thought in relation to Buddhism and Taoism, which are 'religions' in a very different sense from any form of theism. I will not pursue this avenue of investigation here; needless to say, however, it is not absolutely tendentious to

⁹⁷ "Die Philosophie wird keine unmittelbare Veränderung des jetzigen Weltzustandes bewirken können. Dies gilt nicht nur von der Philosophie, sondern von allem bloß menschlichen Sinnen und Trachten. Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten. Die einzige Möglichkeit einer Rettung sehe ich darin, im Denken und Dichten eine Bereitschaft vorzubereiten für die Erscheinung des Gottes oder für die Abwesenheit des Gottes im Untergang; daß wir nicht, grob gesagt, 'verrecken,' sondern wenn wir untergehen, im Angesicht des abwesenden Gottes untergehen."

claim that Strauss's appellation of 'religious thinker' applies to later Heidegger. This is because, for Strauss, both philosophy and the philosophical life must always be in opposition to theology and the life based on piety. Heidegger, then, has not sufficiently distinguished the life of philosophy from that of religion, and as such is consigned to the 'religious' side of the opposition.

However, this seems to be contrary to Heidegger's own self-interpretation. Heidegger wishes to distinguish his way of thinking from any sort of pious obedience to a specific revelation. As the above discussion has shown, Heidegger has arguably had this position at least since the time surrounding the composition and publication of *Sein und Zeit*. This being said, what is important for Heidegger, especially the later Heidegger, is to recognize the inherent and ineffable mystery of *Sein's* granting. Dasein's proper mode of comportment is to hold oneself in expectation of new revelations from out of that mystery. This expectant holding, however, takes the form of questioning, specifically a questioning investigation into the meaning of *Sein*.⁹⁸ Needless to say, it is evident, from the above examinations of both *Sein und Zeit* and the works that followed it, that Heidegger's thinking must at least be considered as fundamentally different from a religious perspective as it is commonly understood. This difference is evinced by the lack of any discernable tradition in relation to Heidegger's conception of divinity. For Heidegger, a god's sending only comes from out of the future, not from out of the past; the eschatological promise is only a promise, with no relation to a past tradition. Strauss's claim that Heidegger's thought

⁹⁸ Discussing the difference between the activities of a believer and those of a Heideggerian philosopher, Sikka writes that "whatever may be the similarities between Heidegger's conception of being and the theological conception of God, the mere fact that Christian mystical theology speaks of various conceptions and manifestations of a single God, while Heidegger speaks of gods that beckon to an *Es* [of the '*es gibt*,' that which 'gives' *Sein*] which he does not want to call God is significant. Christian mystical theology is, after all, still *Christian*; it holds to 'God' with faith, and this stance is different from that of Heidegger. In fact, for Heidegger, this stance is the essential difference between faith and philosophy. Philosophy is essential questioning" (*Forms of Transcendence*, 270, author's emphasis).

suggests no practical action other than listening reverently for the “incipient mythoi” (WIPP, 246), the god or gods to come, is ultimately applicable to Heidegger, but as the previous section has shown, Heidegger’s conception of divinity and piety is very different from, and fundamentally at odds with, a religious perspective as it is ordinarily understood.

However, as was also discussed repeatedly above, for Heidegger, philosophy is fundamentally *agnostic*, which for Strauss constitutes a problem, as for him philosophy seems to be fundamentally *atheistic*. To emphasize again, Heidegger claims that philosophy does not take a theoretical position concerning the existence of God. The previous discussion of “Philosophie und Theologie” confirmed this claim, one upheld through “Über den Humanismus” (“[t]he statement that the essence of the human being consists in being-in-the-world...contains no decision about whether the human being in a theologico-metaphysical sense is merely a this-worldly or an other-worldly creature [*ein diesseitiges oder...ein jenseitiges Wesen*]” (PM, 266; GA 9, 350)) and the *Beiträge* (“the talk of ‘gods’ here does not indicate the decided assertion on the extantness of a plurality [i.e., pantheism] over against a singular [i.e., monotheism] but is rather meant as the allusion to the undecidability of the being of gods, whether of one single god or of many gods” (CP 308; GA 65, 437)).⁹⁹ Heideggerian ontology is concerned with the structures of human existence found in every instantiation of Dasein and thus with all human beings, and does not heed the distinction between the structures of the lives that follow, respectively, ‘human

⁹⁹ Even with these constant denials, Löwith sees in Heidegger a “religious motive,” namely one “which precisely on account of its dogmatically unattached indeterminacy appeals all the more to those who are no longer faithful Christians but who nonetheless would like to be religious” (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 133). Strauss would agree with Löwith’s remarks, calling Heidegger’s eschatological musings “fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than from philosophers” (SPPP, 34).

guidance or divine guidance.’¹⁰⁰ Strauss expresses this distinction clearly in the following passage:

[o]nly through the Bible is philosophy challenged by knowledge, viz., by knowledge revealed by the omniscient God, or by knowledge identical with the self-communication of God. No alternative is more fundamental than the alternative: human guidance or divine guidance. *Tertium non datur*...each of the two antagonists proclaims something as the one thing most needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite to that proclaimed by philosophy. (“Reason and Revelation,” an appendix to Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 149-150)¹⁰¹

As Heidegger has not sufficiently distinguished the philosophical life from that of religion due to attempting to describe the essential structure of human existence common to all lives, Heidegger has not fully distanced his philosophical position from a religious conception of human existence. As for Strauss ‘there is no third thing,’ he thereby is categorized as what could be called, in accordance with Strauss’s understanding, ‘religious thinking.’

2.5 Heidegger’s Conception of Philosophy’s Task in Response to the Crisis of Modernity

As I outlined in the Introduction of this thesis, we can find, chiefly in *Natural Right and History*, Strauss’s particular conception of philosophy’s task, that is, what philosophy

¹⁰⁰ As Williams concludes, “[w]e can expect no answer from Heidegger as to the place of God in his thought, because God is not to be found therein, but beyond” (*Heidegger’s Philosophy of Religion*, 130). Tanguay elaborates on the difference between the life of pious obedience and that of philosophical questioning: “[t]he very model of obedient faith is embodied by Abraham, who, although he does not grasp the meaning of God’s injunction ordering him to sacrifice his son Isaac, obeys the divine command. Socrates’ response to the Delphic Oracle is altogether characteristic of the philosophic attitude. He does not consider Apollo’s judgement, according to which he is the wisest of men, final. Instead, he seeks to test its validity. He substitutes rational examination of the divine command for blind obedience” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 171). Cf. also the passage from Sikka quoted in n. 96 above.

¹⁰¹ Cf. NRH, 74: “[t]his dilemma cannot be evaded by any harmonization or synthesis. For both philosophy and the Bible proclaim something as the one thing needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite of that proclaimed by philosophy: a life of obedient love versus a life of free insight.”

is to accomplish as response to the ‘crisis of modernity,’ itself described in outline in *The City and Man* and elsewhere. As I will now show, Heidegger also understands his respective project as responses to what he views as the ‘crisis of modernity.’ However, there is a crucial difference between the two thinkers in terms of this discussion. Strauss considers the crisis to be at its basis political in nature, or concerned with the question of the best way of living for human beings, while Heidegger believes it to be at its basis ontological in nature, or concerned with the question of Being.¹⁰² I will now attempt to outline what I conceive to be Heidegger’s conception of the task of philosophy in response to this crisis,¹⁰³ drawing from both ‘early’ and ‘late’ writings, in order to prepare for a full confrontation of this conception with that of Strauss, to be conducted in chapter 3 of this thesis.

The introduction of *Sein und Zeit* describes Heidegger’s impetus and projected results for the book as a whole. Heidegger describes philosophy’s task there as a *Destruktion*, a ‘destructuring’ or a ‘deconstruction’ of the tradition of ontology. This *Destruktion* is carried out because “[i]f the question of Being is to have its own history

¹⁰² This is not to say that Strauss is only concerned with the political elements of the crisis, or that Heidegger is only concerned with the ontological elements. Rather, each thinker’s respective conception of the crisis determines what they find most important about it and how they view it; both thinkers consider the ontological *and* the political elements of the crisis, however.

¹⁰³ Immediately we are confronted with a problem. Werner Marx claims that “because [Heidegger’s] thought is of the nature of a path no comprehensive definition of the ‘task and issue’ of thought can be given” (“Thought and Issue in Heidegger,” in *Radical Phenomenology: Essays in Honour of Martin Heidegger*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), 19). If Heidegger’s thought is characterized by movement, and not characterized by a goal or endpoint, how is it possible to identify a ‘task’ for philosophy? Heidegger’s constant references to the importance of questioning due to the problematic character of philosophical thought that claims eternal truth, evinces this movement. However, this seems to be acceptable for Strauss: Heidegger’s thought “refutes all systems of philosophy—by doing this, it does the cause of philosophy the greatest service” (“Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy,” 132). A passage from *The Essence of Human Freedom* (trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2005)) elaborates the notion of philosophy as questioning, and in this passage Heidegger’s position is strikingly similar to Strauss’s: “[p]erhaps the *strength and strike-power of philosophizing* rests precisely on this, that it *reveals the whole only in properly grasped particular problems*. Perhaps the popular procedure of bringing philosophical questions together in some kind of framework, and then speaking of everything and anything without really *asking*, is the opposite of an introduction to philosophy, i.e., a semblance of philosophy, *sophistry*” (10).

made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved” (BT, 44; SZ, 22). It is through this *Destruktion*, Heidegger believes, that one can “arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since” (BT, 44; SZ, 22). Through this *Destruktion*, then, we can discover the history of ontology as a series of responses to Heidegger’s formulation of the question of the meaning of *Sein*. This indicates Heidegger’s novelty as seemingly the first philosopher since Plato and Aristotle to have brought forth this question in the first place, or at least to have made the question appear in this way.¹⁰⁴

This *Destruktion* is not merely meant in the negative sense of a “shaking off of the ontological tradition” (BT, 44; SZ, 22), i.e., abandoning and negating those traditional elements of ontology which seem to have forbidden access to the subject matter Heidegger wishes to address. Rather, it is in those elements themselves that Heidegger claims one can find “the positive possibilities of the tradition” (BT, 44; SZ, 22).¹⁰⁵ This is accomplished through “keeping [the tradition] within its limits...[which are] in turn given factually in the way the question is formulated at the time, and in the way the possible field for

¹⁰⁴ While I do not follow his interpretation, it is critical in the context of this thesis to consider Rémi Brague’s position that Heidegger’s radicality places him on a plane of thought higher than that of Strauss, perhaps even higher than that of Socrates: “[c]alling philosophy down from heaven to the cities, from ‘divine’ (or ‘natural’) realities to human things, must necessarily become a minor event if, by doing so, we do nothing more than shift from one region to another within the same ontological field, namely *Vorhandenheit*” (“Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (1983), 68). A response to this claim requires an examination of the respective reasons for holding either ontology or political philosophy to be ‘first’ philosophy, which I address in detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ “The ‘destruction’—whose intent is positive and not, as so frequently alleged, destructive—is therefore not only an appropriation but also a transformation of the tradition” (Alexander von Schoenborn, “Heidegger’s Question: An Exposition,” in *Martin Heidegger in Europe and America*, 50). As was quoted in chapter 1 of this thesis, Strauss believes that Heidegger’s *Destruktion* “made it possible for the first time after many centuries—one hesitates to say how many—to see the roots of the tradition as they are” (JPCM, 450). This is indeed a ‘transformation’ of the tradition, one which amounts to nothing more, but also nothing less, than permitting us to approach past thinkers free of the sedimentation of traditional interpretive scholarship. Strauss understands *Destruktion* as the way to Heidegger’s “laying bare of [Greek philosophy’s] roots, the laying bare of it as it was in itself and not as it had come to appear in the light of tradition and of modern philosophy” (“A Giving of Accounts,” in JPCM, 462).

investigation is thus bounded off” (BT, 44, emphasis removed; SZ, 22). Each epoch-making philosophical investigation in the tradition of ontology has thus determined the answer to the question of the meaning of Being for that epoch, and through *Destruktion*, claims Heidegger, the question itself will be made evident. Heidegger thus suggests a violent rereading of those whom he views in *Sein und Zeit* as the originators of such epoch-making moments: Kant, Descartes, and Aristotle. The investigation into these thinkers composes the missing second half of *Sein und Zeit*. Heidegger turns to the history of philosophy in order to make clear that that history’s forgetfulness of the question of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) has persisted since the time of Plato and Aristotle.

Why does Heidegger suggest that the task of *Destruktion* is necessary? Because, he claims, firstly, that “[b]asically all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its innermost aim if it has not firmly clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task” (BT, 31, emphasis removed; SZ, 11). Heidegger claims that, in *Sein und Zeit*, he will show that all ontology previous to his investigation is fundamentally ungrounded. Previous ontology is ungrounded because it has made claims about what *is* that rely for meaning on the *Sein* of *Seiendes* and not *Sein* as it is in itself. Hence, it has *never* addressed the problem of *Sein* deeply enough. As Heidegger says, “[t]he conflict as to the Interpretation of Being cannot be allayed, because it has not yet been enkindled” (BT, 487, emphasis removed; SZ, 437). The conflict concerning the ontological meaning of Being remains to be endured. Secondly, as ontology stands as more basic than particular ontic sciences, i.e., all other fields of human investigation, the investigation into the meaning of Being has the highest ontic priority as well. All sciences would finally have received ontological grounding as a result of Heidegger’s investigation, if he had completed

the task set out in the introduction of *Sein und Zeit*.¹⁰⁶ Finally, and most importantly, Heidegger's *Destruktion* has a therapeutic purpose in response to what he identifies as *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of the question of Being characteristic of the history of philosophy since Plato and Aristotle. The forgetting of the question of Being, left unanswered at the core of all thought since the ancients, remains for Heidegger the sole and highest task of philosophy to answer.¹⁰⁷

We cannot go into the reasons why this task was never completed without making a long detour into speculation concerning Heidegger's entire corpus. Without going into further detail, we can say that by 1935, when Heidegger gives his lectures on an *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, his view as to how to accomplish the primary goal of philosophy had certainly been modified. Metaphysics, as Heidegger understands it at this time, asks the question "why are there first of all beings rather than nothing?" ("*[w]arum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?*"), which is the "widest" (*weiteste*), "deepest" (*tiefste*), and "most fundamental" (*ursprünglichste*) of questions, and hence "first in rank" (*erste dem Range*) (IM, 6-7; GA 40, 8-10).¹⁰⁸ Metaphysics thus inquires into the reason why there is something and not rather nothing. Asking 'why' in turn leads us to the question of the value of *Seiendes*, for what reason or purpose they are here at all; at this time, then, Heidegger is moving away from what seems to be the strictly ontological, value-free

¹⁰⁶ The question of whether this task is possible seems, for Heidegger, ultimately to have been answered in the negative, at least in light of Heidegger's revision of philosophy's task in his later writings.

¹⁰⁷ "Heidegger concern is...with 'unraveling' the history of ontology to show the decisive steps that lead to the dominance of the ontology of *Vorhandenheit* and to the forgetfulness of 'being,' that is, to the prejudice that being has no concrete meaning" (Dorothea Frede, "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 60). Additionally, despite the possibility of 'turns' in Heidegger's thought, Heidegger's struggle against this prejudice persists throughout. The fundamental question to ask for the purposes of this thesis, however, is whether or not the question of *Sein*, i.e., the domain of ontology, takes priority to the question of the Good, i.e., the domain of political philosophy. I will return to this issue in greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that in the German, there is no '*es gibt*' or 'there are' in Heidegger's fundamental question. English grammar disallows a translation without it.

scientific investigation of *Sein und Zeit*. The relation between ontological questions and the particular æqoj of human existence will become one of the guiding problems of Heidegger's later works.

Heidegger also understands philosophical investigation as much more closely linked with the particular historical epoch in which the investigator finds him- or herself, which is incidentally consistent with Heidegger's understanding of the history of ontology in *Sein und Zeit*.¹⁰⁹ Here, Heidegger, seemingly echoing Nietzsche, claims that

[a]ll essential questioning of philosophy remains necessarily untimely [*unzeitgemäß*]. This is so because philosophy is always projected far in advance of its time, or because it connects the present with its antecedent, with what *initially* was. Philosophy always remains a knowledge which not only cannot be adjusted to a given epoch but on the contrary imposes its measure upon its epoch. (IM, 8, translation modified, emphasis in original; GA 40, 10)¹¹⁰

Through linking to the past and future of the epoch in which it finds itself, philosophy essentially changes or determines the present. Heidegger understands this present to be fundamentally the occurrence of an "authentic having-been in the history of a people" (*eigentlichen Geschehen in der Geschichte eines Volkes*) and philosophy can even produce the "foreringing" (*Vorklang*), or preceding indication, of such development (GA 40, 11, my translation).¹¹¹ If this is the case, then there is no way to determine what philosophy's task can be, as "every stage and every beginning of its development bears within it its own law"

¹⁰⁹ "When a philosopher turns to philosophy's own history he must realize that this tradition constitutes that from which he thinks as well as that from which he, to some degree at least, must try to get away" (Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Destructive Retrieve and Hermeneutic Phenomenology in *Being and Time*," in *Radical Phenomenology*, 117-118). While this comment, the idea that a *sui generis* thinker unattached to a particular historical tradition and situation is impossible, is meant to refer to *Sein und Zeit*, it applies equally to Heidegger's position in the *Einführung*.

¹¹⁰ "Alles wesentliche Fragen der Philosophie bleibt notwendig unzeitgemäß. Und das deshalb, weil die Philosophie entweder ihrem jeweiligen Heute weit vorausgeworfen ist oder aber, weil sie das Heute an sein früher und *anfänglich* Gewesenes zurückbindet. Immer bleibt das Philosophieren ein Wissen, das sich nicht nur nicht zeitgemäß machen läßt, das vielmehr umgekehrt die Zeit unter sein Maß stellt."

¹¹¹ It is important to note the usage of vocabulary from *Sein und Zeit* here, especially *eigentlich* and *Geschichte*. *Volk* also gives one pause, especially considering the period in which these lectures were delivered (to say nothing of Heidegger's remarks concerning National Socialism later in the lectures).

(IM, 8; GA 40, 11).¹¹² Philosophy, as essentially untimely, breaks through the limitations its own time would place on it. Perhaps ominously given the historical-political circumstances of the lecture, Heidegger here claims that “[w]hat is untimely will have its own times” (IM 8; GA 40, 11), or that an *eigentlich* philosophy of the future will eventually come to pass.

Also given the historical-political circumstances at the time, Heidegger’s next claim is startling: “[w]hat philosophy essentially can and must be is this: a thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of knowledge that set the norms and hierarchies, of *the knowledge in which and by which a people understands its existence in the historical-spiritual world*, the knowledge that enflames and threatens and necessitates all questions and values” (IM 10, my emphasis, translation modified; GA 40, 12).¹¹³ Philosophy is understood here as revolutionary, in the specific sense of allowing a *Volk* to fulfill the historico-cultural promise it holds within itself, to achieve and understand itself in the context of the *geschichtliche-geistige Welt*. Philosophy, as *unzeitlich*, reorients a *Volk*, giving this *Volk* its *geistig* purpose and mission, or, more specifically, allowing “this people, that which we [Germans] are, to obtain a destiny from out of this [historical-political] determination” (GA 9, 41, my translation and additions).¹¹⁴ We can see immediately a connection to Heidegger’s discussion in *Sein und Zeit* of “Dasein’s fateful

¹¹² Heidegger, contra Strauss, seemingly believes that there are no ahistorical limitations on or goals for philosophical questioning, no final truth to be discovered, as all philosophical investigation is essentially determined by its own time (even if it is ultimately against that time, or ‘untimely’). For Heidegger, to attempt to posit a final goal for philosophy is to fall prey to an unexamined understanding of *Sein* as *Vorhandensein*, or to understand the ‘highest’ beings as those which are eternal and hence eternally *present*.

¹¹³ “Was dagegen die Philosophie ihrem Wesen nach sein kann und sein muß, das ist: eine denkerische Eröffnung der Bahnen und Sichtweiten des maß- und rangsetzenden Wissens, in dem und aus dem ein Volk sein Dasein in der geschichtlich-geistigen Welt begreift und zum Vollzug bringt, jenes Wissen, das alles Fragen und Schätzen befeuert und bedroht und nötigt.”

¹¹⁴ “...aus dieser Bestimmung, derer wir gewiß sind, wird sich dieses Volk...ein Schicksal erwirken...”

destiny in and with its ‘generation’” (BT, 436; SZ 384-385),¹¹⁵ and at this point Heidegger has become much more specific concerning whom his conception is intended to describe: the fundamentally *German* people, “the most metaphysical of nations,” which is “caught in a pincers [*Zange*]” (IM 38; GA 9, 41) between Russianism and Americanism.

Heidegger’s revolutionary conception of philosophy’s task is, after the lectures of the *Einführung*, modified again. Philosophy and politics are no longer explicitly linked in speaking of the spiritual situation of a people. However, at this point one could view Heidegger as presenting an even more revolutionary task for philosophy than politics, namely that of *prophesying*. Rather than offering suggestions for political effect, philosophy is transformed into preparation for ‘the gods to come,’ or the new epoch determined by a new meaning of *Sein*.¹¹⁶ I will examine Heidegger’s letter to Jean Beaufret entitled “Über den ‘Humanismus,’” the so-called “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” as this letter most clearly shows the difference Heidegger believes to exist between philosophizing and what constitutes the proper mode of such preparation, *Denken* or ‘thinking.’ Philosophy, in

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida writes that the *Einführung* “proposes a kind of *geopolitical* diagnosis, of which all the resources and all the references return to spirit” or *Geist*, which for Derrida connects to *Sein und Zeit* through the “thematics of resolution” (*Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 44). Without examining Derrida’s analysis in great detail, it is important to note his identification of a certain continuity (one revolving around the concept of *Geist*, which I will not explore at this moment) from *Sein und Zeit*, through the *Einführung*, and further to the later works.

¹¹⁶ At this point, I follow Stanley Rosen’s interpretation of Heidegger, one which appears to be based on Strauss’s, who characterizes Heidegger as a ‘visionary’ (SPPP, 34). Rosen believes that “Heidegger is a prophet, and the scope of his prophecy is that of the entire history of Being, that is, of the concealment of Being by the production of beings. From this standpoint, Husserl and Strauss are provincials in comparison with Heidegger, who follows Nietzsche in this crucial sense: he wishes to destroy the corrupt and hopelessly nihilist values and doctrines, not only of his day but of the entire epoch of the Western tradition. The prophet instructs us to clear the ground of the tradition to make room for the coming of some future God” (“Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 121). While Heidegger’s ‘prophecy’ is content-free, it is difficult to see if his constant references to divinity and ‘the holy’ (*das Heilige*) are merely rhetorical or a necessity of attempting to translate *Denken* into writing. Regardless of this problem, “[i]n view of his authorial intentions, one might wish to say that Heidegger’s texts are insufficiently obscure” (“Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern,” 122). Also following Strauss, Zuckert notes the prophetic character of Heidegger’s writings. For Strauss, claims Zuckert, “the late Heidegger hoped to open the way for a ‘return of the gods,’ that is, for the emergence of a new world religion” (*Postmodern Platos*, 173).

the mode of metaphysics, is associated with technological thinking, and “by and by, philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. [At this point,] [o]ne no longer thinks; one occupies oneself with ‘philosophy’” (PM, 242; GA 9, 317). This is because, according to Heidegger, metaphysics as a way of describing the whole is deficient: metaphysics “does not think Being as such, does not think the difference between Being and beings...[and] [m]etaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself” (PM, 246; GA 9, 322). This task is left for the *andere Denken*, that which Heidegger promotes as the correct way for human beings to orient themselves in accordance with *Sein*. We begin to see Heidegger’s turn to poetic metaphor, which is the mode of expression of *prophecy*, any time he wishes to describe the nature of the *andere Denken*, e.g., describing the nature of human beings as the ‘shepherd of Being’ (*der Hirt des Seins*). The task of philosophy, here reconceived as ‘thinking,’ is to prepare for the arrival of...what? New gods, new dispensations of *Sein*, something impossible to capture in the language of metaphysics and reason. In fact, “the thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics, a name which says the same thing [as philosophy]” (PM, 276, translation modified; GA 9, 364).¹¹⁷ Heidegger here is making the claim to abandon entirely the history of philosophy that has come before him, to abandon the language of metaphysics which does not recognize the ontological difference as a result of its continuous searching for highest causes. In its place, we are to wait in expectation for that which is dispensed from beyond the horizon of our thinking.¹¹⁸ The activity to be

¹¹⁷ “Das künftige Denken ist nicht mehr Philosophie, weil es ursprünglicher denkt als die Metaphysik, welcher Name das gleiche sagt.”

¹¹⁸ Identifying a principal difference between early and later Heidegger, Samuel IJsseling writes that “the destruction [of *Sein und Zeit*] is directed towards reaching an *original level*, a ground from which philosophical concepts are rooted and grounded or a source from which they are drawn, whereas that cannot be the case with the end of philosophy” (“The End of Philosophy as the Commencement of Thinking,” in *Critical Heidegger*, 202). For the later Heidegger, the distinction between philosophy and *Denken* is

conducted during this waiting is *Denken*. Heidegger, at this time, seems to hold himself to be the herald of the new age, and his radicality is evident.¹¹⁹

This letter was published in 1949; however, as Heidegger himself indicates, the origin of its thinking comes from much earlier, 1936 to be exact.¹²⁰ Heidegger's *Beiträge*, as was mentioned above, is seen retrospectively as the source of much of his later thinking. This does not mean one can readily find quotations in this work which were subsequently modified for later ones. Rather, in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger seemingly has abandoned all pretense to 'careful scholarship,'¹²¹ and is writing as the prophet of the advent of *Sein*. Distinguishing the history of philosophico-metaphysical thinking from the thinking that is to come, Heidegger says that "futural thinking is a thinking that is underway, through which the domain of Being's essential sway—completely hidden up to now—is gone through, is thus first lit up, and is attained in its ownmost event-character" (CP 3, translation modified; GA 65, 3).¹²² The history of metaphysics has heretofore hidden the historico-temporal site or clearing into which *Sein* sends itself from out of itself, and it is the task of futural thinking, the *andere Denken*, to prepare this site through making its

paramount. For example, in *Was ist das: die Philosophie?*, published in 1955, Heidegger continuously makes the distinction between philosophy as an *activity*, the pursuit or desire of the *sofōn*, and *filōsofōj* as a *characteristic* of the way of living in harmony with the *sofōn* (WP, 45-53)

¹¹⁹ See Brague, "Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought," quoted in n. 102 above.

¹²⁰ See PM, 239 n. A (GA 9, 313 n. A), especially Heidegger's remarks concerning the "other language" (*andere Sprache*) which he contrasts with that of metaphysics, the language of the "Letter." The *Beiträge*, therefore, can be regarded as Heidegger's effort to produce a text written using the *andere Sprache*.

¹²¹ This ambiguous claim is, I believe, intentionally so: scholarship is abandoned, and the resulting interpretive problem is such because prophetic writing cannot be debated or argued with. At the same time, the mode of prophetic writing necessitates the abandonment of, from the point of view of prophecy, 'human-all-too-human' reason, i.e., "the most obstinate adversary of thought" (GA 5, 267, my translation). As well, it is possible that Heidegger's animosity toward 'conventional' scholarship has persisted at least since the time of *Sein und Zeit*. Alan Megill notes that in the contemporary academic situation, Heidegger "finds that it is so seductively easy to know *about* things that one risks not *knowing* anything at all" (*Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 120, author's emphasis), and *Destruktion* is an attempt to correct this situation by subverting the powerful grasp which 'conventional' scholarship has on any understanding of the tradition.

¹²² "Das künftige Denken ist Gedanken-gang, durch den der bisher überhaupt verborgene Bereich der Wesung des Seyns durchgangen und so erst gelichtet und in seinem eigensten Ereignischarakter erreicht wird." The connection between *eigentlich* (terminology drawn from *Sein und Zeit*) and *eigensten* is lost in translation.

existence and character evident. This preparation will produce an “essential transformation of humanity from ‘rational animal’ (*animal rationale*) to Da-sein” (CP 3, translation modified; GA 65, 3).¹²³ Heidegger here suggests that the *andere Denken* will bring about a radical change in the nature of humanity, a change which will result in the abandonment of the definition of humanity as the Aristotelian rational animal. Heidegger thus positions himself in opposition to the entire history of philosophy since Plato and Aristotle, which has consistently extolled ‘reason’ as the way in which to acquire knowledge. He makes his thinking the method by which to ‘overcome’ that history and the language of metaphysics in which it participates and through which it perpetuates itself. Heidegger understands the *Beiträge* as a “preparation for the going-over” (*Vorbereitung des Übergangs*) from metaphysics to the *andere Denken*, to the “other beginning” (*andere Anfang*) (GA 65, 6), conceived as the preparation, accomplished through poetic activity, of the clearing in which *Sein* sends itself and thereby brings about a new epoch. It is interesting to note here that Heidegger no longer speaks of a Nietzschean-Spenglerian *Untergang*, but rather an *Übergang*, an ascendancy. This eschatological idea brings Heidegger’s thinking very close to religious thought, but, in accordance with the previous section of this chapter, we must understand here that this is religion without God as the three major monotheistic religions conceive it, and most importantly without the corresponding practical element, the divinely-inspired law or ethical framework in which human beings find themselves and must participate. Heidegger prepares for the God-to-come, and such thinking rules out the God(s) who may have already arrived or who may have been here from the beginning.

We can also understand Heidegger’s conception of the crisis of modernity as having three separate and distinct forms. These forms roughly correspond to the time of *Sein und*

¹²³ “...einem Wesenswandel des Menschen aus dem ‘vernünftigen Tier’ (*animal rationale*) in das Da-sein.”

Zeit, the time of the *Einführung*, and the time beginning with the *Beiträge* and continuing to the end of Heidegger's career. After examining the three forms derived from the above books, I will examine the posthumous interview titled "Nur ein Gott kann uns retten" conducted in 1966 but only published in 1976 upon Heidegger's death. One may see this interview as a candidly-conducted final summation of Heidegger's view of the possibilities faced by human beings in the future.¹²⁴

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger's conception of a crisis is, given the textual evidence, at first glance limited to a crisis of sciences. Specifically, the crisis concerned the basic concepts of particular sciences, and the crisis was indicated by "the freshly-awakened tendencies to put research on new foundations" (BT, 29; SZ, 9). These tendencies can be seen as arising from the general direction in which philosophy continued after Hegel, passing through the various stages of neo-Hegelianism, neo-Kantianism, Nietzsche, and finally Husserl as an attempt to reground scientific investigation.¹²⁵ The crisis of the sciences to which Heidegger is referring initially arose because of the effect of historicism on sciences: if all thought is a product of its time, how is it possible to claim that science discovers truths that are timeless? In the lecture *History of the Concept of Time*, delivered

¹²⁴ Speaking specifically of early Heidegger, Bambach notes here that "out of those superficial and modish discussions of crisis in history, science, theology, and philosophy emerged a genuine philosophy of crisis" found in Heidegger (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 14, author's emphasis). Bambach goes so far as to say that "[*Sein und Zeit*-era] Heidegger affirmed crisis as the originary state of all science and philosophy," and this radical position "rendered the traditional 'crisis' of historicism antiquated and irrelevant" (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 14-15). There is a similarity here to Strauss's position that Heidegger's radical historicism breaks with historicist thought that came before. Cf. NRH, 25, as discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹²⁵ In distinction to Heidegger, Husserl held even as late as 1934 that the crisis facing the West was primarily one of the preponderance of what Husserl calls 'naturalism,' i.e., the tendency to reduce every scientific explanation to a naturalist account, thereby eliminating the possibility of intentionality in relation to human action. Husserl believed that through considering the problems at hand in this way, [u]ltimately the proper sense of European man's crisis should come to light" (*Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, 155). Husserl understood the overall crisis to be primarily a result of the crises erupting from out of the domain of science. It is interesting to note, though, that there is a parallel understanding between Husserl's conception and that of later Heidegger, especially in relation to Heidegger's conception of technological *Gestell* and the danger it presents.

in 1925, Heidegger mentions the crisis of the sciences must be understood “in a twofold sense” (HCT, 2). The first is “the sense in which contemporary man, especially among the young, feels that he has lost an original relationship to the sciences” (HCT, 2). This sense is above all for Heidegger expressed in Max Weber’s lecture, *Science as a Vocation*. However, Heidegger believes there to be a deeper crisis, one “internal to the sciences themselves,” indicated by the fact that “their basic relationship to the subject matter which each of them investigates has become questionable” (HCT, 3). Heidegger’s suggestion is to return to the question of *Sein* in order to find ground for the understanding of *Seiendes* respective to each science, an “original interpretation which [the sciences] themselves are incapable of carrying out” (HCT, 3).¹²⁶

Heidegger thus begins his attempt to come to terms with the crisis in which he finds himself through addressing the contemporaneous expression of that crisis. For Heidegger, “the level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts” (BT, 29; SZ, 9). A particular science can advance in direct proportion to how deeply its own foundations are called into question. Heidegger’s project in *Sein und Zeit* is to show how unstable those foundations are, and to show the way to stability through limiting the scope of scientific investigation. This limitation is indicated by science’s relegation to merely ontic inquiry. Thus, Heidegger holds that the various crises of the sciences themselves indicate an ontological crisis: the question of *Sein* “has today been forgotten” (BT, 21; SZ, 2). Ontology, for Heidegger, is the architectonic science, concerned as it is with *Sein* and not *Seiendes*, and thus a resolution of the question of *Sein* would allow

¹²⁶ James F. Ward remarks that “Heidegger’s teaching calls for bearing up to the face of the crisis and turning it to our advantage” (*Heidegger’s Political Thinking* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 25). This ‘advantage’ is that, understood properly, the crisis of the sciences allows for a renewed view of the question of *Sein*, and thus is an indication of the deeper crisis, for Heidegger the contemporary situation of *Seinsvergessenheit*.

for resolutions of the various crises of the sciences.¹²⁷ For the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, though, the crisis had not yet expanded to encompass human existence, understood as *political* existence, as such.

At the time of the *Einführung*, we find a changed conception of crisis, one more incendiary and apocalyptic. At this moment, Heidegger believes the crisis is one concerning the entirety of humanity, and includes the political situation, the possibility of religion, and the continued existence of the West.¹²⁸ Heidegger speaks of Europe in the ‘great pincers’ (*großen Zange*) of Russia and America, of communism and liberalism. This situation, and all of its effects, is named “the spiritual decline of the Earth,” and the only way out of the situation is to make a “decision...in terms of new spiritual energies unfolding historically from out of the centre” (IM, 37-38; GA 40, 41-42), the centre being Germany and its *Volksgeist*.¹²⁹ This decision is fundamentally negative, a rejection of the two choices of communism or liberalism. Heidegger claims that the crisis has resulted from a collapse of German idealism, but this is not because of a fault within German idealism

¹²⁷ “The crisis of the sciences, in Heidegger’s reading, opened up a crisis in the foundations of ‘classical science’ as a whole” (Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 216), i.e., modern science based upon Cartesian subject/object dualism which then resulted in the modern schism between facts and values, *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*, and so forth.

¹²⁸ Bambach believes that “Heidegger’s complicity in the world-historical drive of National Socialism was not an incidental sideline by was fundamentally related to his own understanding of the particular historical situation in Weimar as one of ‘crisis’” (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 261). In opposition to the crisis, National Socialism “provided the hope of a new beginning in the planetary-political sense” (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 260). It is important to keep Bambach’s remarks in mind when one considers Strauss’s position that “Heidegger is the only man who has an inkling of the dimensions of the problem of a world society” (“Existentialism,” 317) and “Heidegger learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man” (“Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” 34).

¹²⁹ Heidegger says much the same thing in his *Rektoratsrede*, “Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität,” delivered in May of 1933 on assumption of the rectorate of Freiburg University. The possibility of the event that the “spiritual power of the West fails and the West starts to come apart at the seams...[and] that this dead pseudoculture [*abgelebte Scheinkultur*] collapses into itself, pulling all forces into confusion and allowing them to suffocate from madness” can only be staved off by the decision that “our people [*unser Volk*] fulfill its historical mission” as a *geschichtliches-geistiges Volk* (“The Self Assertion of the German University,” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Richard Wolin (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), 38, translation modified; *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, Hermann Heidegger, ed. (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 19). As is discussed forthwith, Heidegger uses similar vocabulary in the *Einführung*.

itself. Rather, “the age was no longer strong enough” to “realize” the philosophical insights contained within idealism (IM, 45; GA 40, 49). Heidegger here repeats Spengler’s assessment of modernity as being about to enter its period of decline, or *Untergang*. However, Heidegger is more optimistic concerning the chances of the West. At this moment, Heidegger believes that it is Germany’s mission to revive the possibility of its *Volksgeist*, and therewith the *Geist* of Europe: the situation “implies that this people [i.e., Germany], as a historical people, must move itself and thereby the history of the West beyond the centre of their future ‘happening’ and into the originary realm of the powers of Being. If the great decision regarding Europe is not to bring annihilation, that decision must be made in terms of new historical spiritual energies from the centre” (IM, 38; GA 40, 41-42, translation modified).¹³⁰ This will result in a return to understanding human beings in accordance with what Heidegger claims to be a necessary rank ordering. Such an understanding is in opposition to what for Heidegger is the ‘levelling’ effects of both communism and liberalism.¹³¹

¹³⁰ “All das schließt in sich, daß dieses Volk als geschichtliches sich selbst und damit die Geschichte des Abendlandes aus der Mitte ihres künftigen Geschehens hinausstellt in den ursprünglichen Bereich der Mächte des Seins. Gerade wenn die große Entscheidung über Europa nicht auf dem Wege der Vernichtung fallen soll, dann kann sie nur fallen durch die Entfaltung neuer geschichtlich *geistiger* Kräfte aus der Mitte.”

¹³¹ See IM, 46; GA 40, 49. It is here we find Heidegger’s striking analogy of the “blind mirror” (*blinden Spiegel*) which, in reflecting the image of human beings back to themselves, shows them not as natural creatures of varying ability and worth but as uniform in rank in accordance with the unnatural principles prescribed by communism and liberalism. As Hans Sluga notes, through his examinations of *Sein*, “Heidegger hoped to ground the political order that was emerging in Germany in 1933” (*Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 231). Sluga goes on to question the legitimacy of any philosophical grounding of politics: “[i]n retrospect we may wonder whether this search for a foundational order was not altogether misconceived. Do such orders even exist? Are philosophers qualified to find them? Is it their task to legitimize political systems by referring them back to supposed philosophical orders? Can political actions and arrangements ever be justified in absolute terms? Must we not acknowledge that politics is part of a practical realm where reasons are always temporary, pragmatic, and opportunistic?” (*Heidegger’s Crisis*, 231). It is remarkable that Strauss’s conception of political philosophy and the relation of philosophy and politics demands the asking of exactly the same questions. Heidegger ignores these questions, as well as, in regards to his unification of communism and liberalism, the different conceptions of what constitutes a *citizen* in each respective regime. Recognition of Heidegger’s ignorance casts light on his and Strauss’s diverging understandings both of the essence of human

At the moment of the *Beiträge*, very soon after the lectures of the *Einführung*, Heidegger has modified his conception of crisis again, and for arguably the final time. Heidegger still speaks here in an apocalyptic mode, but the apocalypse has been broadened to include the entire world and all of history. Humanity is at a moment of decision, but such a decision is not for this or that *Volksgeist*, or this or that philosophico-political system. Rather, the decision is “whether Being [*Sein*] definitively withdraws, *or* whether this withdrawal as refusal becomes the first truth and the other beginning of history” (CP 63; GA 65, 91). The possibility of Being’s withdrawal is linked specifically to the problem of technology and how the technological may in fact become the final understanding of *Sein*.¹³² The crucial difference between the concept of ‘decision’ of the *Einführung* and that of the *Beiträge* is that in the *Beiträge*, the decision can only be for or against the preparation for the arrival of *Sein*’s decision. The crisis cannot be resolved by merely human endeavour, and thus *nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*. This, the title of Heidegger’s final interview from 1965 and published after his death in 1976, indicates the continuity of his thought, from the *Beiträge* onwards, concerning humanity’s chances in the coming age.¹³³ For the later Heidegger, the task of philosophy is to prepare for the solution to the crisis from out of *Sein*, or the permanent darkening of the world and the flight of the gods. Philosophy cannot change the course of the errance of *Sein*; all it can do, if it is properly reconceived and recommenced as *Denken*, is indicate the way of waiting for *Sein*’s future sending.

beings and of the essence of philosophical activity. I will examine these diverging understandings more thoroughly in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹³² I will discuss Heidegger’s conception of technology as *Gestell* in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹³³ The content of the *Der Spiegel* interview was discussed in greater detail in the previous section of this chapter, so I will not repeat myself here.

It is important to note for the purposes of this thesis that for Heidegger, the political crisis is a mere epigone of the more fundamental ontological crisis, which is constituted by the possibility of the technological mode of disclosure of *Sein* becoming the final such mode, thereby destroying the possibility for *Denken* as Heidegger understands it. Throughout Heidegger's career, though, his understanding of the crisis of modernity finds its expression in the withdrawal of the question of *Sein*, be it in the context of *Sein und Zeit* or the later writings.¹³⁴ For Strauss, conversely, the crisis is primarily political, as it is the crisis of liberal democracy. This crisis is constituted by the loss of faith in the principles of liberalism and democracy, due not to the history of Platonic metaphysics covering over the proper way of comportment to *Sein*, but, most fundamentally, the ultimate radicalization of the specifically modern philosophical project—epitomized by Heidegger himself. I leave further discussion of the reasons for this divergent understanding for chapter 3 of this thesis.

2.6 Conclusion

As I have shown in the above investigation, Strauss's critical claims have varying degrees of applicability. First, Strauss accuses Heidegger of being a radical historicist, and as such the most extreme example of modern philosophy as distinguished from ancient philosophy. This accusation is characterized by Strauss's claim that for Heidegger, human beings are fundamentally historical creatures and all human thought is itself historically conditioned/determined. There is thus no possibility of eternal truth, and thus no possibility

¹³⁴ Michael Allen Gillespie outlines what Heidegger understands to be the cause of the crisis, referring to all periods of Heidegger's writings: "[Heidegger] saw this crisis as a result of the forgetfulness or withdrawal of the question of Being. In Heidegger's view, existence is at its core mysterious. Being as such in the most fundamental sense is always only *as* a question" ("Martin Heidegger's Aristotelian National Socialism," *Political Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April 2000), 141, author's emphasis).

to attain the end of philosophical investigation as Strauss conceives it to be. Heidegger would agree to this characterization, but not as something negative. For Heidegger, recognition of the historical-temporal character of Dasein in fact allows Dasein to live authentically (*eigentlich*), that is, to choose from amongst its possibilities in full recognition of those possibilities being its own (*eigen*). Not recognizing this historical-temporal character continues to reinforce the prejudice, persisting since Plato, of holding that 'to be' is most fundamentally 'to be always.'

Second, Strauss accuses Heidegger of misinterpreting *Angst*, or the 'experience of history,' as the basic experience of human beings. Again, Strauss says that this claim is a result of Heidegger's unacknowledged dependence on modern philosophy. For Heidegger, *Angst* is certainly a basic mood of Dasein, one which reveals Dasein's essential *Nichtigkeit* and therefore allows for *eigentlich* decision-making. This is because *Angst* shows the historical character of Dasein, allowing Dasein to know itself as *geworfen*, as thrown into an arbitrary situation. For Strauss, this arbitrary situation is captured by the first position of human beings in Plato's analogy of the cave, and the experience of history, contrary to Heidegger's intention, in fact allows humans to recognize the cave for what it is. For Heidegger, a philosophical position that holds the experience of history to be a 'cave' implies that there is something outside of the cave, i.e., that there is eternal knowledge to be discovered. Hence, Heidegger would consider Strauss's claim to be simply inadequate to the phenomena and thereby an uncritical perpetuation of Platonic metaphysics of presence. For Heidegger, there is no escaping either the historical character of truth, or the historical essence of Dasein.

Third, Strauss claims that Heidegger's thought has a religious character, which indicates that Heidegger did not rigorously distinguish between reason and revelation as

two sources of knowledge, or as the respective bases of two ways of life. In respect to this claim, Heidegger seemingly changes his mind a number of times. The early Heidegger, pre-*Sein und Zeit*, says things like ‘I am a Christian theologian.’ This indicates that Heidegger thought of himself as working through theological problems. It would seem that Strauss’s claim holds for the early Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit*, however, presents itself as a work of fundamental ontology, and is careful to distinguish on numerous occasions both its fundamental non-ethical character, and the way in which it examines certain concepts in distinction from theology. It seems, then, that *Sein und Zeit*, as ontology, is agnostic in character, or at least is intended to be. The *Einführung in die Metaphysik* shows an even more divisive conception of the relation between philosophy and theology. There, Heidegger believes that philosophy and theology are fundamentally opposed, due to the fact that theology does not ask about the meaning of *Sein*, and simply accepts that *Seiendes* are created by God. One year later, Heidegger’s *Beiträge* abruptly shifts, using much more mystical, quasi-religious language and no longer rejecting God out of hand. However, Heidegger continues to distinguish between religion or theology in its Christian variant and the ‘religion’ of *Denken*, as well as the ‘God to come’ for which *Denken* prepares the way. It is also important to note that Heidegger characterizes *Denken* as a questioning, or an investigation, rather than a passive waiting for a sign from the futural God or *Sein*. Thus, while Heidegger uses religious language, it is not clear whether he in fact was a religious thinker. For Strauss, though, this does not matter, as he considers the religious life to be one of pious obedience to the revealed truth about the whole. Strauss’s concern with religion, from the perspective of political philosophy, is, most fundamentally, the ethical and hence political import of religion. When Strauss calls Heidegger ‘religious,’ this appellation must be understood in relation to Strauss’s conception of the theologico-political problem.

Specifically, in the attempt to circumscribe the essential structure of all human existence (as instantiations of Dasein), both religious and philosophical, Heidegger misses the crucial distinguishing features of religious and philosophical lives. This, I will argue in chapter 3, is a result of Heidegger's belief that 'first philosophy,' understood as the point at which philosophy must begin, is a concern with the question of Being. Strauss, conversely, believes philosophy to begin by the question of the best human life, i.e., the question of the Good, and as such 'first philosophy' will be an examination of the opinions concerning the Good—Strauss's conception of political philosophy.

Finally, Strauss and Heidegger can be seen to differ on two critical points: the task of philosophy, and the crisis of modernity to which philosophy must respond. For Strauss, the task of philosophy is to comprehend and act in accordance with the Good, and 'first philosophy,' as it were, is essentially political philosophy. This is not to say that Strauss does not consider *Sein* to be a worthwhile subject of investigation; rather, it is through our political/historical situation that we come to know *Sein* in the first place. Heidegger reverses this structure. The Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* believes the task of philosophy to be a *Destruktion* of the history of ontology; the Heidegger of the *Einführung* and the *Beiträge* believes it to be the preparation for the arrival of a new sending of Being. However, even with the large differences between these two conceptions of philosophy, Heidegger remains most fundamentally an ontologist. Questions of politics arise in his works, but they are always addressed in relation to ontology. This is because for Heidegger, to comprehend the political things properly they must, as *Seiendes*, first be understood in their *Sein*, which in turn necessitates an investigation into the meaning of *Sein* in general. Strauss's and Heidegger's respective understandings of the crisis of modernity reflect this distinction. For Strauss, the crisis is one of natural right: the end of belief in the possibility of discovering

an answer to the question of natural right, due to historicism making such a discovery impossible. For Heidegger, the crisis is ontological in character. For the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, the crisis is one of the sciences at their foundations, i.e., what does it mean to be an object of a particular ontic scientific investigation? For the later Heidegger, the crisis includes politics, for it is one of the fate of humanity in general. However, the crisis is still one of ontology. The crisis either will result in the complete dominance of technology as the meaning of *Sein*, or the new beginning characterized by *Denken*.

For Strauss, ontology is secondary to political philosophy; for Heidegger, political philosophy is subsumed by ontology. Strauss believes that Heidegger is fundamentally a modern philosopher; Heidegger believes himself to stand apart from the entire history of philosophy which came before him. Strauss believes the history of philosophy to be most fundamentally that of political philosophy; Heidegger believes the history of philosophy to be most fundamentally that of ontology. Several seeming impasses between the two thinkers have thus appeared. For the purposes of this thesis, though, the entire conflict must be understood in light of what Strauss sees as the theologico-political problem. This problem is concerned most fundamentally with the Socratic question of philosophy, how one should live. According to Strauss, the highest question one can ask is whether the Socratic question is to be answered by reason or, conversely, to be abandoned and replaced by pious obedience to revelation. However, Heidegger's overriding concern with *Sein* has led him to view the tension between reason and revelation, concerned as it is with ways of human living, to be a problem which philosophy, *qua* ontology, must understand first and foremost in relation to the problem of *Sein*. For Strauss, this is Heidegger's greatest error, a consequence of Heidegger's modern tendency not to hold firmly apart reason and revelation as two possible sources of wisdom for human beings.

Given the controversial nature of Strauss's critique concerning Heidegger, as was made evident by the preceding chapter, it is now necessary to return to Strauss's writings again, in tandem with those of Heidegger. This will be done in order to see if Strauss's critique of Heidegger in fact hides a certain affinity for Heidegger, while at the same time not adhering to all of Heidegger's claims. If this is the case, then it is also necessary to investigate why Strauss criticized Heidegger in the way that he did, especially when we consider Strauss's primary hermeneutic principle, that of esoteric writing.

3. Strauss and Heidegger: Convergence and Divergence

In the essential strife, rather, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their essential natures.

—Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will first reexamine the previous investigation concerning Strauss’s overall critique of Heidegger and the subsequent excursion into Heidegger’s texts done to see if Strauss’s critique is indeed apt. This has been undertaken with the overarching presupposition that Strauss’s critique is intended not to refute or attempt to circumvent Heidegger’s thought, but rather to indicate how it is possible to revive or retrieve philosophy as it is understood by Strauss in an era, deeply influenced by Heidegger, that seems to give up on that possibility from the start.

This reexamination is intended to be an introduction to the main points of convergence and divergence present in the conflict between Strauss and Heidegger, namely the concepts of nature, first philosophy, and the method by which to read a philosophical text. As I will argue at the conclusion of the chapter, it is Heidegger’s method of reading, or his approach to confronting the history of philosophy, which is the most problematic given his phenomenological stance and which conditions the rest of his philosophical position. I will thus discuss the three aforementioned concepts in reverse order showing how Strauss’s reading of and adopting certain aspects of Heidegger’s thought can be seen as a way in which to take the best results or effects of Heidegger’s philosophical position while at the same time being truer to the spirit of phenomenology, a spirit shared, in a particular way, with Socratic philosophy as Strauss understands it. This spirit of phenomenology, understood in the basic sense as the philosophical rallying cry, ‘to the things themselves!,’

is expressed in Strauss's continuous emphasis on the inherently political character of prephilosophical human existence. Heidegger's lack, according to Strauss, of due consideration of this political character guides Strauss's main lines of critique outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis. This lack of proper understanding of 'the political' thus leads to Heidegger's and Strauss's divergent understandings of the concept of 'nature,' the way in which to address nature philosophically, and the way in which to read a philosophical text. This chapter consists mainly of an analysis of these divergent understandings, in order to show how Strauss ultimately unifies these three understandings expressions of the structure of the 'second cave' in which modern thought is trapped.

3.2 Results of the Foregoing Investigation

Before the aforementioned divergences are addressed, it is useful to recapitulate the point at which we are as a result of the previous two chapters' investigations. Strauss claims Heidegger to be the archetypal, indeed the *only*, radical historicist, and as such the most extreme example of modern thought. This is because, according to Strauss, Heidegger radicalizes certain tendencies of those thinkers who came before him, most prominently Nietzsche, Rousseau, and even Machiavelli.¹ With Heidegger, humanity is made 'absolutely at home on the earth,' as Heidegger makes philosophy the study of human *Existenz* detached from any notion of eternity. Heidegger, conversely, believes himself to

¹ Strauss considers these three thinkers to be the 'peaks' or 'crests' of what he terms 'the three waves of modernity' in the essay of the same name. As Heidegger is named as the most radical modern, it follows that, for Strauss, Heidegger radicalizes the general intellectual tendency or trajectory which Strauss determines to exist in these three thinkers. It is useful here to compare Strauss's view of Heidegger with one of his remarks on Machiavelli in NRH: "Machiavelli denies natural right, because he takes his bearings by the *extreme situations* in which the demands of justice are reduced to the demands of necessity, and not by the normal situations in which the demands of justice in the strict sense are the highest law" (162, my emphasis). Later in the book, Strauss understands existentialism, in its focus on extreme situations, to ignore "prudence, 'the god of this lower world'" (321). For Strauss, Heidegger's philosophical analysis continues the trajectory begun by Machiavelli.

stand outside of the trajectory of modern thought, as he argues that there is no fundamental division between ancient and modern thought on the most important issue. For Nietzsche just as much as for Plato, those whom Heidegger considers as the end and the beginning of metaphysics, respectively, the highest sense of ‘to be’ is ‘to be always present.’² Heidegger, attempting to distinguish himself from the history of metaphysics, argues that he is the first since Plato and Aristotle to investigate the unexamined question of the meaning of *Sein*, to which ‘to be always present’ is just one possible answer. However, in reading the history of philosophy, Heidegger does not take into account the explicit statements of particular thinkers when they speak of their specific objects of study, which are often political in character. This is for two reasons: 1) Heidegger begins from a particular presupposition, that the history of philosophy is most fundamentally the history of ontology or ‘responses to the unsaid of *Sein*,’ whether or not philosophers were explicit about this fact; and 2) Heidegger operates under a particular methodological claim, namely that the unsaid meaning of *Sein* present in any particular thinker’s work is the most fundamental element of that work. For Strauss, Heidegger adopts the typically modern tendency, explicitly stated in Kant, that later thinkers understand their forerunners better than the forerunners understood themselves.³ Also, Heidegger ignores those thinkers who, at least at first reading, tend to deal only or primarily with political subjects, e.g., Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke,

² Without delving into this topic, worthy of thorough exploration in its own right, I limit myself to saying that Heidegger considers Nietzsche’s conception of the eternal return as ultimately a reversal of Platonic metaphysics, and as a mere reversal, Nietzsche’s thought is still trapped in a Platonic understanding of Being.

³ “I shall point out only that there is nothing unusual in finding, whether in ordinary conversation or in writings, that by comparing the thoughts uttered by an author on his topic we understand him even better than he understood himself, because he did not sufficiently determine his concept and thus sometimes spoke—or, for that matter, thought—[in a manner] contrary to his own intention” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1996), A314/B370). Strauss claims that historicist approaches repeat Kant’s tendency: “historicism is the belief that the historicist approach is superior to the non-historicist approach, but practically the whole thought of the past was radically ‘unhistorical.’ Historicism is therefore compelled, by its principle, to attempt to understand the philosophy of the past better than it understood itself” (WIPP, 68). I examine these issues in further detail below.

Rousseau, etc. It is precisely this type of thinker on which Strauss exhausts much of his interpretive energy. The question of why Strauss reads the history of philosophy in this way will be examined below; for now, it is enough just to state that for Strauss, philosophy is in the first place political because political existence is the natural first position for human beings, the first situation in which human beings find themselves.

For Strauss, to say that human beings are naturally political means that human beings naturally exist in the cave, i.e., in a particular conventional political situation, situated on the earth at a particular time in history. Heidegger radicalizes this claim; for him, human beings are *absolutely* at home on the earth in history, and there is no possibility of discovering permanent and universal truth, or, in other words, leaving the cave. The idea that human existence cannot attain permanent and universal truth—something higher than historical, or fluctuating and arbitrary, truth—causes *Angst*. However, claims Strauss, this is not to say that *Angst* is the beginning of philosophical activity, as he claims Heidegger to hold. Rather, for Strauss philosophy begins in wonder. This is because the differences between the truths sanctioned by various political situations, various caves, point towards the fundamental problems, or what Strauss identifies as the Ideas in the Platonic sense.

Heidegger, therefore, is ignoring the fact that it is from the perspective of political philosophy that the fundamental philosophical problems come into view, for political philosophy, having as it does the opinions present in the particular political situation as the starting point from which to discover truth, is the only way to attain an understanding of *Sein* that could be called ‘phenomenological’ in Heidegger’s sense.

Strauss also claimed Heidegger’s thought to be of a religious character; our subsequent excursion into Heidegger’s thought showed this to be a fraught appellation. However, Strauss’s claim can be reinterpreted through a particular understanding of

religion, or the religious, an understanding which arises upon consideration of what Strauss terms the theologico-political problem. As I will show below, Strauss understands religion to be in a profound relation to politics, as the origins of the cave, the origins of the particular political situation in which one finds oneself, are themselves venerated as divine in character. I believe the appellation of religious thinking to Heidegger, understood in light of Strauss's understanding of the relation between religion and politics, can be seen as appropriate. Heidegger is concerned primarily with the form of human *Existenz* as it occurs in everyday, which is from the start *political*, life. Heidegger does not realize the inherent political character of his subject matter, and therefore, in his consigning the political to the realm of the ontic, neglects the determinative character of this fundamental element of human life.

As was shown in the last chapter, Heidegger differs greatly from Strauss on both the task of philosophy and essence of the current crisis to which philosophy hopes to respond. However, if human life is fundamentally in the first place political, then Strauss's claim that the crisis is political in nature seems to be the right one. The task of philosophy, then, is not to wait for the newest 'sending from out of *Sein*,' but rather to develop philosophy in a political way, and thereby to address the current crisis through the edifying quality of the philosophical examination of the fundamental problems.⁴ I will develop this point below; for now it is critical to note the relative weight attributed to the political in each thinker's

⁴ It is important to remember Strauss's words concerning philosophy, that "[p]hilosophy must be on its guard against the wish to be edifying—philosophy can only be intrinsically edifying" (LAM, 8). I believe this sentence to be a warning against the tendency to attempt to ground concrete political action in philosophical theory. Strauss is thus arguing against philosophers such as Hegel and Marx here, not to mention a number of contemporary thinkers who could be called 'postmodern,' who possess conceptions of philosophy constituted at least in part as active participation in political revolution. Strauss's conservatism, comprehended from the perspective of political life, is evident here.

respective thought, and constantly to be aware of this primary difference in the discussion that follows.

3.3 Specific Points of Convergence and Divergence: Nature, First Philosophy, and Hermeneutic Method

Strauss and Heidegger have distinctive conceptions of what counts as 1) nature, 2) ‘first philosophy,’ and 3) the hermeneutic method or approach in accordance with which to read a philosophical text. The differences between these respective conceptions are, I will argue, a function of each thinker’s respective position vis-à-vis a number of oppositions, the most evident of which being the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*—an opposition which much of Strauss’s work was an attempt to reenact. This reenacting of the *querelle* is also shown in the opposition between each thinker’s respective position concerning the relative priority of theory and practice, which, primarily, is related to the relative importance each thinker assigns to the political. After discussing the differences between their positions concerning the above concepts, I will discuss certain binary oppositions which can be shown as applicable to the relation between Heidegger and Strauss, and which can be captured under the opposition between ancient and modern approaches to philosophical investigation—primarily understood as a distinction characterized by the relative importance and conception of the *political*. This is not to say that Strauss considers the opposition between ancient and modern thought to be the most important; this place is reserved for the opposition between reason and revelation as two possible understandings of the whole and its origin, as well as how one should live in accordance with each understanding. Heidegger, for Strauss, is the most radical modern, and it is a hallmark of

modern thought that the question concerning reason and revelation, as Strauss understands it, has been settled. As I have shown, however, when we turn to Heidegger's thought itself, it can be argued that he attempts in a unique way to resurrect this question, and to reinterpret human existence in light of it. This attempt can be seen in, e.g., claiming that it is in fact the task of humanity to be 'shepherds' of *Sein*. Heidegger, or at least the later Heidegger, is or acts like a prophet.⁵ For Strauss, the philosopher and the prophet are in eternal conflict, or, more precisely, the respective content and activity of the philosophical and the religious life are in eternal conflict. This would seem to indicate a reason for Strauss's critical position towards Heidegger: simply put, Heidegger does not recognize the tension due to his focus on the question of *Sein*. Yet, as Strauss also says, "this unresolved conflict is the secret of the vitality of Western civilization" ("Progress or Return?," 116). The three aforementioned categories, nature, first philosophy, and hermeneutic method, have been selected in order to enkindle the conflict between Heidegger and Strauss, expressed as the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, and how this conflict sheds light on the more fundamental one between reason and revelation. This conflict, finally, is the essence of the theologico-political problem, which I will take up again in the conclusion of this thesis.

⁵ In Strauss's essay "Existentialism," Strauss's concluding discussion seems to hold the later Heidegger in high regard because of the upshot of his later thinking, namely that it brings to light the tension between Western and Eastern modes of thinking, or, otherwise expressed, between rational and revelatory modes of thinking. Seemingly acknowledging Heidegger's understanding of human political organization as necessarily religious, Strauss claims that "Heidegger is the only person who has an inkling of the problem of a world society" ("Existentialism," 317).

3.3.1 Strauss's and Heidegger's Respective Conceptions of Nature

In the following section, I use the term 'nature' in its most general sense, referring most fundamentally to 'what is,' i.e., the whole or the *kòsmoj*. In this, I follow Strauss's use of 'nature.' In the case of Heidegger, the concept of the '*Sein des Seiendes*' is the rough equivalent to 'the whole' in Strauss's sense. Strauss speaks of the nature of things, or what each thing is as a part of the ordered whole. The relation between each thing and the whole of which it is a part, as Strauss understands it, is structurally the same as the relation between *Sein* and the *Seiendes* which instantiate *Sein*, as Heidegger understands it. For Strauss, things are essentially determined by their place in the whole as that whole is understood; for Heidegger, beings are essentially determined by how they are understood to instantiate particular modes of *Sein*. For Strauss, and unlike the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, however, things possess their nature apart from the characterization that humanity's dealings with them impose on them. For the early Heidegger, as we shall see, Strauss's position is not possible.⁶ The later Heidegger suggests that natural beings possess a particular conception of *Sein* apart from humanity's dealings with them, but in a way fundamentally at odds with understanding of beings that philosophy in Strauss's sense holds.⁷ The most important difference between the two thinkers' respective conceptions of nature to note here is that for Strauss, things are understood in their nature in light of the

⁶ Robb A. McDaniel claims that Strauss possesses "three distinct levels within nature," what he calls "nature proper," "the human," and "the things," which he then ties to Heidegger's threefold conception of Being, Dasein, and beings, respectively ("The Nature of Inequality: Uncovering the Modern in Leo Strauss's Idealist Ethics," *Political Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (June 1998), 330 and 343, n. 17). While partially correct, this collapsing of Strauss's and Heidegger's respective positions does not take fully into account Heidegger's claims that *Sein* only 'is' where beings like Dasein 'are' as well. For Strauss, conversely, nature *qua* 'whole' persists regardless of the existence of human beings within it.

⁷ This is not to say that for Heidegger, *Sein* can exist where human beings do not exist. Being is always the Being of a being, to be sure (see BT, 29; SZ, 9), but "Being 'is' only in the understanding of those beings to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs" (BT, 228, translation modified; SZ, 183), or, more precisely, "only as long as Dasein is... 'is there' Being" (BT, 255; SZ, 212). See Strauss's critique of Heidegger's position in chapter 1, n. 41 of this thesis.

particular *political* opinions concerning them, while for Heidegger, things are understood in their nature in light of the particular understanding of *Sein* of a given epoch, and hence in the first place *ontologically*. This difference will be shown in the following discussion.

We will now turn again to Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, which contains Strauss's clearest expression of what for him counts as nature, or the natural.⁸ Strauss begins Chapter 3 of his book, titled "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right," with a discussion of nature in the context of natural right, i.e., what is the right or best way of human life in accordance with the nature of human beings. It is important to note at the outset a possible equivocation of 'nature.' At the start of this chapter, Strauss distinguishes 'natural' from 'scientific;' 'natural' here means "the way in which [political things] present themselves in political life, in action, when they are our business, when we have to make decisions" (NRH, 81). This conception of 'natural' is for Strauss, a key conception for understanding the problem of natural right, which is a political problem. The possible

⁸ "Only by recognizing the elements that belong to the problem of nature is philosophy possible" (Richard H. Kennington, "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, in *Leo Strauss's Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*, 239). It is also important at the outset of this discussion to remember that nature is simultaneously "that most important and least developed of Strauss's themes" (Robert Pippin, "The Modern World of Leo Strauss," in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Emigrés and American Political Thought after World War II*, 149). Strauss is elusive when it comes to describing exactly how he conceives nature to be, because his dual conception of nature, as I will show, is in direct relation to his conception of esoteric writing. By this I mean that, as we will see, Strauss identifies the problem of the tension between a teleological conception of human nature, which would seem to be necessary given his understanding of human nature, and a non-teleological conception of nature apart from human beings, which would seem to be necessary given what has been discovered of the 'first things' of nature. Human beings always act in accordance with ends or goals; at the same time, the natural world seems to function wholly without ends or goals, at least on the scale of (merely) human life. The problem of this contradictory account of nature becomes even more pronounced in the modern scientific age due to its tendency to view specifically human behaviour in terms of scientific causation, and, to preserve human freedom, ultimately causes Kant to posit the distinction between facts and evaluative claims. Norms for human existence become a function of the way in which human beings exist in the world, rather than a function of the way that the world (or nature) determines how human beings should live. Finally, if human beings are fundamentally historical, norms become historical too, and we arrive at Heidegger. This problem, for Strauss, only finds its solution in the simultaneity of the esoteric and the exoteric in the teachings of Socratic philosophy. Socratic philosophy, as well as Strauss, claims Laurence Berns, "understood the natural or prescientific, prephilosophical perspective to be constituted at its core by a tension between the demands of piety and the divination of an impersonal nature that leads to philosophy and science," and "[p]olitical philosophy...articulates that fundamental tension" ("The Prescientific World and Historicism," 175). I examine this issue further below.

equivocation appears in the following paragraph, which states that “the discovery of nature is the work of philosophy” (NRH, 81). Hence, it seems we have two understandings of nature at the outset: ‘nature’ as such, which is to be investigated/unearthed, and the ‘nature’ of political things, which is how the political things first appear to us. In a footnote, Strauss indicates these two meanings explicitly: “[1)] ‘nature’ as essential character of a thing or a group of things and [2)] ‘nature’ as ‘the first things’” (NRH, 83, n.3).⁹ The possible equivocation dissolves, however, when we see the intended method of reception of the two concepts. Natural right and nature, as objects of philosophical investigation, are not the same. Natural right, the object of political philosophy, is understood to be in accordance with the nature of human beings, but nature itself, the whole and the relations between it and its parts, is the domain of philosophy as such. The two parallel endeavours, philosophy and political philosophy, address two different yet related fields of objects; with this distinction, Strauss is given license to say that “[p]hilosophy is older than political philosophy” (NRH, 82). This is of course common knowledge; pre-Socratic philosophy did not examine political objects, and it has been argued that Socrates was the originator of political philosophy, the first to turn from the natural to the human things as objects to examine. I will return to this bifurcation of philosophy and political philosophy below, where I hope to show its critical importance.¹⁰

⁹ McDaniel explains this distinction in another way, which, I believe, helps to clarify the issue. Nature has the sense of both 1) “the ‘natural horizon,’ or the totality of that which first appears to us by opinion,” and 2) “the things as they are ‘in themselves’ or in their first principles,” as well as “‘the whole’ which makes possible the parts as parts” (“The Nature of Inequality: Uncovering the Modern in Leo Strauss’s Idealist Ethics,” 326). We can tentatively state here that Strauss’s sense of ‘nature’ has political *and* ontological/cosmological elements. The problem, addressed in the next section, is which elements are to have priority, in the sense of first to be examined, in philosophical investigation.

¹⁰ For Kennington, Strauss’s analysis of the dual conception of nature shows that before the beginning of Socratic philosophy, “[t]he understanding of nature tended...to have the character of a descent from the first or divine or imperishable things,” rather than “ascend[ing] from the kinds of things” (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 240). An attempt to ground the essence of natural beings in a particular divine code that belonged to a particular political grouping was unlikely, not to say impossible. Thus, claims Kennington, “[i]t

Strauss presents what could be considered as a ‘phenomenology’ of nature, with ‘phenomenology’ better understood here in the Hegelian, not the Heideggerian, sense, i.e., a historical description of each step in the development of the concept of nature, and hence the activity of philosophy, discussed in turn in order to show how each step develops out of the previous one.¹¹ Strauss considers ‘nature’ to have first been a “term of distinction,”¹² “for the discovery of nature consists precisely in the splitting-up of that totality [i.e., the whole or what is—DT] into phenomena which are natural and phenomena which are not natural” (NRH, 82). To explain what he means, Strauss notes that “[p]rior to the discovery of nature, the characteristic behaviour of any thing or class of things was conceived of as its custom or its way” (NRH, 82). Each thing in the world behaved or existed in a certain manner, and this manner was considered the essential feature of the thing. At this

was necessary to embark on an inquiry into the human things to establish what could be attributed to the divine codes, i.e., to human decision and agreement, and what was independent thereof” (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 240-241). Political philosophy, the study of the human, thus arose necessarily from philosophical inquiry into the study of the whole. Eugene F. Miller emphasizes this change in orientation: “Socrates held that the ‘nature’ of a thing refers primarily to ‘what’ it is, to the form or essence that provides its specific character, and not to its material component or to the forces that produced it” (“Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy,” 74). Socratic philosophy, for Miller and also for Strauss, is a *correction* of pre-Socratic philosophy, for “[i]n reducing things to their elements or originating causes, this approach has lost sight of what it is that makes each class of things distinctive” (“Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy,” 74).

¹¹ This development is not necessarily toward a particular end, as a Hegelian phenomenology would indicate (cf. “[the] preservation [of Spirits], regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency is History; but regarded from the side of their...comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance” (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 493)). Perhaps it is better to say that Strauss conducts a ‘genealogy’ in the Nietzschean sense here, a search for the ‘origin’ of the concept of nature without regard to its teleological unfolding over time; cf. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 15.

¹² For Strauss, claims Victor Gourevitch, “[n]ature’ is not a proper name” (“Philosophy and Politics II,” *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 22 (1968), 284). Instead, Strauss speaks of the ‘idea of nature’ as what is to be investigated. It is critical to remember here that for Strauss, “[a]n idea is a fundamental problem” and that “[i]deas can come to be” (Kennington, “Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 236). As my discussion of *Natural Right and History* will show, “Strauss does not offer philosophy as a form of foundationalism, but rather as the severest challenge to authority in *all* its forms. The ‘discovery of nature’ may be the work of philosophy, but ‘nature’ turns out to be (at least in moral and political affairs) no more than a kind of ‘regulative ideal,’ a symbol not of ready-to-hand yardsticks or banisters but of the desire to avoid the identification of the moral with the conventional” (Dana R. Villa, “The Philosopher Versus The Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 1998), 162, author’s emphasis).

prephilosophical moment, “no fundamental distinction was made between customs or ways which are always and everywhere the same and customs or ways which differ from tribe to tribe”¹³ (NRH, 82). Rather, each thing simply had its way.

The most important of these ways at this point in the historical (or prehistorical) development of natural right was “‘our’ way, the way of ‘us’ living ‘here,’ the way of life of the independent group to which a man belongs” (NRH, 83). This way was considered to be the ‘right’ way, as it was ‘our’ way or the group’s way, as opposed to the ‘wrong’ way, or ‘their’ way. It was considered the ‘right’ way not only because it was ‘ours’ or the group’s, but also because it was old and venerated. Hence, the ‘right’ way finds its justification in its ancestral character. As such, “the right way necessarily implies thoughts about the ancestors and hence about the first things simply” (NRH, 83). The ancestral status of the ‘right’ way does not succeed in justifying adherence to it without an acknowledgement of the important connotation that “the ancestors, or those who established the ancestral way, were gods or sons of gods or at least ‘dwelling near the gods’” (NRH, 84). If this is the case, “the right way must be a divine law” (NRH, 84).

If the right way is considered originally to be a divine law, its justification ultimately rests on authority, namely the authority of the divine or the religion that has developed concerning the divine. Philosophy, by contrast, is not satisfied with justification by authority. Natural right, as a problem, requires the philosopher to doubt authority, to

¹³ It is unclear exactly to which era Strauss makes reference here, although we can assume it to be shortly before the rise of Greek philosophy. However, it is likely that Strauss does not want to refer to specific dates or events in his discussion, perhaps in order to avoid the question of the rise of the understanding of nature anthropologically (specifically in a social-scientific manner, which he just spent much of Chapter 2 of *Natural Right and History* critiquing).

doubt those opinions claiming that the question of the ‘right’ way is settled. Hence, “the emergence of the idea of natural right presupposes...the doubt of authority” (NRH, 84).¹⁴

For Strauss, philosophy’s initial path was determined by the character of the authority under which it came to be, thereby shaping the original doubt of that authority. Doubt of authority is doubt of what Strauss calls “divine codes” (NRH, 86), or theologico-political commandments in accordance with which each political group must live. The problem, one which leads to the doubt of authority in general, is that “the various codes contradict one another. One code absolutely praises actions which another code absolutely condemns” (NRH, 86). And it is not just the actions following from the codes which conflict: “the various codes contradict one another in what they suggest regarding the first things” (NRH, 86). As a result, “the question arises as to which code is the right code and which account of the first things is the true account” (NRH, 86). Left with the dilemma of a plethora of contradictory accounts of the origin of the whole and good human action within that whole, “the right way is now no longer guaranteed by authority; it becomes a question or the object of a quest” (NRH, 86)¹⁵. Authority loses its power once it is realized that the only basis for that power was the fact that one’s ancestors claimed it as true. Strauss finally connects the two conceptions of nature, those of ‘the right way’ and ‘the first things:’

¹⁴ Parenthetically, the previous discussion indicates something of Strauss’s understanding of what he calls the ‘theologico-political problem,’ which, according to his own autobiographical remarks, is the guiding problem of his entire *oeuvre* (“Das theologische-politische Problem ist seitdem [i.e., since the time, early in Strauss’s career, of his first exposure to revelation as a possible challenge to philosophy—a challenge exemplified by thinkers such as Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig—DT] *das* Thema meiner Untersuchungen geblieben” (GS 3, 8, Strauss’s emphasis)). The authority of political opinions arises due to the purported divine status of the origin of those opinions. We can see how for Strauss the problem of the relation between reason and revelation, and the problem between philosophy and politics, are in fact one and the same: the problem of the effect of the doubt of authority, in all its forms, concerning the whole and the ‘right’ way to dwell within it. I will return to this subject below.

¹⁵ James F. Ward notes the theologico-political problem caused by philosophy in this sense: “[t]he emergence of philosophy amounts to the uprooting of the authority of the ‘holy city’” (“Experience and Political Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss,” 677), for, Tanguay writes, “philosophy, and therefore the discovery of nature, presupposes and implies the denial of authority of [the divine] codes” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 119).

The primeval identification of the good with the ancestral is replaced with the fundamental distinction between the good and the ancestral; the quest for the right way or for the first things is the quest for the good as distinguished from the ancestral. It will prove to be the quest for what is good by nature as distinguished from what is good merely by convention. (NRH, 86)¹⁶

This quest, however, depends on a previous mode of comportment, namely that which leads one to question the foundations of his or her political order. Such foundations, under the aegis of authority, provide answers to the questions concerning ‘what is good by nature,’ and, as authoritative, must be doubted. This doubt arises through one’s adoption of two methods of distinction. The first is the distinction “between hearsay and seeing with ones own eyes” (NRH, 86), i.e., between dependence on what others have said and experience of something first hand. Strauss notes that this distinction is the basis of one half of the essence of the doubt of authority, for if one can experience something first hand, this experience can be had again by other human beings as well.¹⁷ It is not necessary to communicate such experiences through authoritative codes; it can be shown to others regardless of their specific origin and, as such, experienced again and again. Such

¹⁶ Again emphasizing the political problem which appears with the discovery of nature, Tanguay notes that human beings “will learn to take more pride in [their] own intelligence than in regulating [their] behaviour in accord with the Divine Word” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 171). As Strauss says, “[t]he Old Testament, whose basic premise may be said to be the implicit rejection of philosophy, does not know ‘nature’” (NRH, 81). It is also important to acknowledge that Strauss makes a sort of unification between what could be called the philosophical investigations into the theoretical and the practical, ontology/cosmology and political philosophy, respectively. For Strauss, ontology and political philosophy are two aspects or sides of the same investigation, namely the investigation into ‘what is good by nature’ for human beings. In order to answer this question, human nature must be discovered, which in turn means that the nature of the whole must be discovered. If the questions of philosophy are to be answered in a way satisfactory to the tenets of philosophical examination, political and moral philosophy ultimately require philosophical anthropology, which in turn ultimately requires ontology. However, this is not to say that the questions are in fact answerable, for the Socratic principle of zeteticism prevents it. Gourevitch notes that the unification of political philosophy and ontology immediately causes the problem of how to reconcile Strauss’s differing conceptions of the *virtue* of human beings: “political virtue, the virtue of the citizen...and the excellence of the philosopher or of the wise man” (“Philosophy and Politics II,” 305). The permanent *tension* between these differing conceptions of virtue leads Strauss to emphasize political moderation for philosophy as a way of striking a balance between the conceptions. The concept of moderation finds its clearest expression through Strauss’s notion of esoteric writing, to be discussed below.

¹⁷ “The authoritative teaching concerning the divine origin of the first things is questioned when men insist that its assertion requires a demonstration that begins from what is visible to all men” (Ward, “Experience and Political Philosophy,” 678).

experiences, Strauss would claim, constitute the possibility of historical transcendence: if any human anywhere in the world at any time in history can possibly have the same experience, this is an indication of the possibility of discovering something of the nature of human beings.¹⁸ As Strauss says, it is in this way that “man becomes alive to the crucial difference between what his group considers unquestionable and what he himself observes,” and in this way “[h]e can thus start to replace the arbitrary distinctions of things which differ from group to group by their ‘natural’ distinctions” (NRH, 87). We can say that nature, for Strauss, has the character of that which persists about a thing apart from those characteristics ascribed to that thing by a particular authority.

The second method of distinction constitutes the other half of the essence of the doubt of authority, namely “the distinction between artificial or man-made things and things that are not man-made” (NRH, 88). This distinction concerns products of human artifice, in contrast to those things which are not dependent on human artifice for their existence. Thus, in a quest for the first things, the things which are not artificial are seen as ‘higher’ than artificial things, for “man-made things lead to no other first things than man, who certainly is not the first thing simply” (NRH, 88). Strauss is indicating that the cause of a thing is critical to investigate, and artificial things as such do not provide access to originary causes, the ‘first things’ of which he speaks. The search for the cause of the whole is itself initiated by and through this second method of distinction. For Strauss, natural things thus also have an origination completely separate from artificial things, indicated by

¹⁸ We are reminded here of Strauss’s claim that “...’the experience of history’ does not make doubtful the view that the fundamental problems, such as the problems of justice, persist or retain their identity in all historical change, however much they may be obscured by the temporary denial of their relevance and however variable or provisional all human solutions to these problems may be. In grasping these problems as problems, the human mind liberates itself from its historical limitations” (NRH, 32). Kennington puts the point succinctly, stating that the ‘idea of nature’ indicates “the essentially transpolitical [and, it must therefore be noted, the transhistorical—DT] character of philosophy” (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 247).

the fact that such an origination has a character “fundamentally different from all origination by way of forethought” (NRH, 88-89).¹⁹ Artificial things are made for the sake of human projects; natural things are not.

It is important to note that for this conception of philosophy, the ‘first things’ are in fact the first causes of the things within the whole, or the whole itself, and that these first things “are always and that things which are always or are imperishable are more truly beings than the things which are not always” (NRH, 89). Philosophy’s most fundamental domain of investigation, then, is that which is eternal or unchanging.²⁰ For Strauss, this is because

[it] follow[s] from the fundamental premise that no being emerges without a cause or that it is impossible that ‘at first Chaos came to be,’ i.e., that the first things jumped into being out of nothing and through nothing. In other words, the manifest changes would be impossible if there did not exist something permanent or eternal, or the manifest contingent beings require the existence of something necessary and therefore eternal. Beings that are always are of higher dignity than beings that are not always, because only the former can be the ultimate cause of the latter, of the being of the latter, or because what is not always finds its place within the order constituted by what is always.

¹⁹ This passage hints at the tension between philosophy and religion concerning nature. The concept of ‘nature’ as philosophy understands it does not offer or attempt to discern an overarching purpose for the natural things. Conversely, for religion, every natural thing that exists is part of, and has a role to play in, the divinely-inspired order. Strauss notes this tension: “[w]hat distinguishes the Bible from Greek philosophy is the fact that Greek philosophy is based on this premise: that there is such a thing as nature, or natures—a notion which has no equivalent in biblical thought” (JPCM, 111); and, as was quoted in n. 16 above, “[t]he Old Testament, whose basic premise may be said to be the implicit rejection of philosophy, does not know ‘nature’” (NRH, 81).

²⁰ At first glance, Strauss seems to hold what Heidegger would call a Platonic metaphysics here. It must be noted from the preceding discussion that if Strauss’s description of Platonic philosophy is correct, then Heidegger is seemingly right when he characterizes Plato as holding that the highest meaning of ‘to be’ is ‘to be always present.’ See Heidegger’s discussion of the Platonic conception of *Sein* as expressed in the parable of the Cave, found in “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” PM, 180. However, this is to miss the inherently *hypothetical* character of the Platonic ‘theory of Forms.’ The ‘eternal or unchanging’ structure of the whole is problematic, both in the sense that it is a problem to be investigated, and in the sense that it *is* the totality of the problems of philosophy in their relation. The problems as problems persist regardless of the vicissitudes of history. Cf. the discussion of Strauss’s ‘metaphysical confession of faith’ on JPCM, 471, and the correlated footnote, below. Robert Pippin’s criticism, that “Strauss’s version of a philosophy of nature is a kind of Platonic perfectionism and seems committed to the problematic claim that the true perfection of a human being transcends the human as such” (“Being, Time, and Politics: The Strauss-Kojève Debate,” *History and Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (May, 1993), 159), seems to miss the hypothetical character of what that ‘true perfection’ entails.

Beings that are not always are less truly beings than beings that are always, because to be perishable means to be in between being and not-being. (NRH, 89-90)

It is the fundamental premise of philosophy, the quest for the first things/causes, that the idea of beings originating from nothing is impossible. This is not to say that this origination did not in fact occur, merely that philosophy holds it, and must hold it, not to have occurred.²¹ We must pay careful attention to Strauss's language here: contingent beings require the existence of 'something eternal,' which could very well not be a being or a structure of beings, but instead just the 'order constituted by what is always.' This motif of 'eternal order' or 'framework' occurs repeatedly in Strauss's writings, but, it is absolutely critical to note, this eternal order is described not as a natural hierarchy of beings, but in fact the 'fundamental problems' which persist transhistorically and transculturally. Nature is, expressed differently, "unchangeable and knowable necessity," and this necessity is a presupposition for the possibility of "all freedom and indeterminacy" (NRH, 90). In order to perceive change, it must be measured against a stable background of permanence, or it could not be deemed change. However, this permanence, it must be stressed again, does not necessarily mean some sort of static ontological rigidity, a fixed, permanent structure of being in which human beings find themselves. Rather, for Strauss that which is permanent is merely the structure of philosophical questioning, i.e., the quest after the truth of things which are permanent as opposed to temporary or historical.²²

²¹ A philosophical position which takes seriously the challenge of revelation as the way to explain the whole must seriously consider the possibility of the whole arising out of nothing, as the book of Genesis holds the origin of the whole to be.

²² Ward notes that "[i]t must be made clear that the notion of a natural hierarchy of ends does not depend upon a solution to the cosmological question" ("Experience and Political Philosophy," 680). This means that, for Strauss, it is possible to have a teleological conception of human existence and a non-teleological science of nature. I will examine this conception in further detail below.

It is at this point in Strauss's development of the concept of natural right that the upshot of the discovery of nature is fully realized. The discovery of nature permits the division of the idea of customs or ways into "the customs of natural beings...recognized as their natures, and the customs of different human tribes...recognized as their conventions" (NRH, 90). Nature is thus concerned with the way of natural beings, the essential way of their being, as opposed to the conventional ways of human beings. Thus, "[t]he distinction between nature and convention, between *physis* and *nomos*, is therefore coeval with the discovery of nature and hence with philosophy" (NRH, 90).

It is with this distinction that Strauss presents a countermovement to a Heideggerian understanding of how things of the world, which appear to us as particular instantiations of *Sein*, as primarily, or in the first place, in a way beholden to ontology. For Strauss, "[t]he distinction between nature and convention implies that nature is essentially hidden by authoritative decisions" (NRH, 90-91). This is because it is authority that determines how things appear to human beings at first, and, even further, authority legislates the 'first things' as divine and hence unquestionable. In fact, authority "succeeds to such an extent that nature is, to begin with, experienced or 'given' only as 'custom'" (NRH, 91). Human understanding of nature, even if it is true, is considered to be merely conventional at first. Strauss is indicating his Socratic understanding of the investigation of nature, namely that within the many opinions of the city, the truth is mixed and must be discovered. In this way, "[t]he opinions are thus seen to be fragments of the truth, soiled fragments of the pure truth" (NRH, 124). This is the Socratic way, claims Strauss, for "Socrates implied that disregarding the opinions about the natures of things would amount to abandoning the most important access to reality which we have, or the most important vestiges of the truth which

are within our reach. He implied that ‘the universal doubt’ of all opinions would lead us, not into the heart of the truth, but into a void” (NRH, 124).

As if directly responding to Heidegger, Strauss claims that the fundamental distinction for philosophy is a particular understanding of *Sein*, namely, the distinction “between ‘to be in truth’ and ‘to be by virtue of law or convention’” (NRH, 91). We can express this distinction in other words if truth is eternal and convention is historically transitory: ‘to be always’ versus ‘to be historically/temporally.’ Strauss next states that “[i]f ‘to be’ is ‘to be something,’ then the being of a thing, or the nature of a thing, is primarily its What, its ‘shape’ or ‘form’ or ‘character,’ as distinguished in particular from that out of which it has come into being” (NRH, 122-123). Human beings first come to know a thing’s shape, its εἶδος, as how it is specifically visible to us, and this εἶδος is what Strauss calls “the ‘surface’ of the things” (NRH, 123).²³ The ‘surface’ comes to us naturally or through a natural articulation, namely the natural articulation of things into groups of things classified by each respective εἶδος. We can say, though, that if this natural articulation of the whole is how the whole is presented to us in the first place, this natural articulation is itself conventional, or, expressed with a different emphasis, it is natural for human beings to have, at first, a conventional articulation or understanding of the whole. At least at first, the human understanding of the whole is a function of the authoritative political situation and opinions in and with which particular human beings live.

However, as was discussed above, an opinion can be ‘in truth’ as a ‘vestige’ or ‘fragment’ and yet still be sanctioned by authority. It is the task of philosophy to discover if

²³ We can see here a relation between Strauss’s nascent understanding of a certain sort of phenomenology, discussed up to this point, and his statement, enigmatic in its original context, that “the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things” (TM, 13). I am indebted to Horst Mewes, “Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger: Greek Antiquity and the Meaning of Modernity,” in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Emigrés and American Political Thought after World War II*, 109, for drawing attention to this relation.

the opinions sanctioned by authority as true are true simply. Strauss thus introduces the concept of what can be called a ‘political ontology,’ an investigation which begins from the political articulation of *Seiendes* as the starting point of ontology, which is a reversal of Heidegger’s claim that ontology determines politics or the understanding of political things. For Strauss, it is politics that, at least at first, determines our understanding of beings, and this understanding is only recognizable as a particular authoritative understanding by acknowledging the contrast between the conventional understanding of beings and their natural, or ‘transconventional,’ understanding. Ontology, for Strauss, always begins with an examination of the conventional or political understanding of beings, and hence always begins with the understanding of beings in the ‘here and now.’ If the ‘here and now’ is always understood as a particular political situation, i.e., the situation defined by convention and authority, then it is appropriate to say that for Strauss, ‘political’ ontology always already begins in the Platonic cave, properly recognized as such.²⁴

It is critical to note here that for Strauss, “by uprooting authority, philosophy recognizes nature as *the* standard,” *not* as simply “*the* authority” (NRH, 92). Philosophy

²⁴ As I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, Strauss considered his contemporary philosophical situation to be within a “second, much deeper cave” (*Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921-1932)*, trans. and ed. Michael Zank (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 215), one fundamentally determined by historicism. This second, deeper cave presents difficulties unknown to Plato: “[t]he natural difficulties of philosophers experienced their classic presentation in the Platonic parable of the Cave. The historical difficulties let themselves be illustrated through the saying: there is *now* yet a Cave *underneath* the Platonic Cave” (“Die geistige Lage der Gegenwart,” GS 2, 456, my translation, Strauss’s emphasis). This means that for Strauss, there is an extra level of difficulties for the philosopher, namely the historical difficulties or the situation caused by the radicalization of historicism in Heidegger, and the philosopher must, to follow the metaphor, climb up to the original Platonic cave to encounter the natural difficulties of philosophical activity, namely the sanctioning of truth by authority as I have been describing up to this point. This same metaphor of a ‘second Cave’ appears unchanged in several other works from the early 1930s, including most notably *Philosophy and Law* (136 n.2). As I stated in n. 9 of chapter 1 of this thesis, I follow Tanguay’s interpretation that the ‘second cave’ refers to “history, or, more precisely, . . . historicism understood as a doctrine that proclaims the impossibility of getting outside the [natural] cave” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 44-45); see my discussion there for further detail. Robertson discusses the ‘second cave’ in relation to nature: “[t]he ‘second cave’ of modernity . . . is human history understood as self-constituting reality. To be free of modernity is to dissolve the notion of human history, by regaining contact with a nature untouched by history, and, even in modernity’s nihilism, implicitly constitutive of human life” (“Leo Strauss’s Platonism, 3).

does not search for or attempt to be an authority, because for Strauss, philosophy and authority are permanently in opposition. To consider nature as the highest authority would mean the degeneration of philosophy into what it is not, which for Strauss means “ideology” or “theology or legal learning” (NRH, 92). The most fundamental reason for the opposition is that “the relation of reason or understanding to its objects is fundamentally different from that obedience without reasoning why that constitutes authority proper” (NRH, 92). Strauss here intimates what he considers the character of philosophy to be, namely permanent or zetetic scepticism. If philosophy claims to have discovered truth, it degenerates into a bastion of authority, which is not in accordance with its original essence. I will return to Strauss’s characterization of philosophy in the next section of this chapter.

In regards to the character of nature, Strauss also tentatively introduces the distinction between “human nature” and “nature simply,” for it is seemingly obvious from observation that the natural world, meaning the “cosmic order” of observable natural phenomena, is indifferent to human moral categories (NRH, 94).²⁵ This connects with Strauss’s distinction noted above between natural right and nature as two related but separate objects of philosophical investigation. Here we immediately arrive at a problem: what if all conceptions of natural right are ultimately merely conventional? Strauss, claiming this to be the pre-Socratic view,²⁶ quotes Heraclitus, fragment 102: “[i]n God’s

²⁵ McDaniel characterizes this difference as “nature as ‘the whole’ and nature as ‘original lifeworld’” (“The Nature of Inequality: Uncovering the Modern in Leo Strauss’s Idealist Ethics,” 329), a characterization which emphasizes the ontological/cosmological and political understandings of nature present in Strauss. Ward notes that one of Strauss’s critiques of modern natural science is “the categorical absurdity of failing to take into account the natural differences between human and other natural beings” (“Experience and Political Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss,” 679). Discussion of ‘natural differences’ notwithstanding, Heidegger at least claims there to be a division between the philosophical investigation of human beings and that of other beings: “the ontology of Dasein...is *superordinate* [*vorgeordnet*] to an ontology of life” (BT, 291; SZ 247, Heidegger’s emphasis).

²⁶ “Strauss agrees with Heidegger that Plato and Aristotle, following Socrates, offered a new rendition of the truth of being. Their philosophy is essentially the discovery of nature, or *physis*. According to Strauss, only this new rendition of *physis* made possible political philosophy as an independent branch of philosophy. Thus,

view, all things are fair (noble) and good and just, but men have made the supposition that some things are just and others unjust” (NRH, 93). As a counter to this problem, Strauss notes that there may be a human nature which, while not necessarily possible to derive from an investigation of ‘nature simply,’ may yet serve as a solid ground for morality.²⁷ This ground is possible to discover through an examination of “human desires and inclinations,” which may be divided and classified into those which are natural and those

political philosophy and its central claim that man is by nature political is indeed dependent upon this new post-Socratic view of nature” (“Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger: Greek Antiquity and the Meaning of Modernity,” 107).

²⁷ It seems here that Strauss suggests the possibility of a teleological understanding of human beings, while at the same time recognizing that a teleological understanding of the whole is not forthcoming, not to say impossible. As Velkley states, “[t]here is little basis, if any, in Strauss’s writings for the view that he sought to recover a teleological natural philosophy, or that he thought such recovery a necessary condition for philosophy in its classical form. He thought that the philosopher must come to terms with the unavailability of such cosmology; in the modern era, this means coming to terms with modern science’s failure to provide an account of the human” (“On the Roots of Rationalism: *Natural Right and History* as a Response to Heidegger,” 254). Gourevitch agrees: “Strauss does not anywhere generalize about teleology in nature as a whole” (“Philosophy and Politics II,” 289). See also Ward, “Experience and Political Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss,” for an analysis of the way in which “Strauss deploys at least four lines of argument which call not for the replacement of modern science with ancient science, as some of his critics suggest, but rather for a more adequate philosophy of natural science” (679-681). Indicating the problematic character of this dual conception of nature, Pippin notes that Strauss “does not deny that ‘natural right in its classical form is connected with a teleological view of the universe’ at the same time that he freely admits that ‘the teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science’” (“The Modern World of Leo Strauss,” 149; quotations of Strauss are from NRH, 7-8). Pippin claims that “there is no indication whatsoever that [Strauss] thinks he solves” this problem; Rosen believes the same thing, adding that “because [Strauss] rejects all modern solutions, and in view of the extraordinary progress of modern science, and in particular technology, we are left to assume that the situation is hopeless” (“Leo Strauss and the Problem of the Modern,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 131). According to Kennington, conversely, “Strauss could resolve the teleological problem he raises in two ways. First, he could deny that modern natural science supplies a sufficient basis for rejecting a teleological account of the heavens. Second, he could defend classical teleology to the extent that it is a necessary part of classic natural right. Strauss does both” (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 231). Strauss does this, claims Kennington, while at the same time emphasizing “[t]he Socratic sense of philosophy...[i.e.,] knowledge that one does not know..., as distinct from the Aristotelian, Stoic, or any other classic sense of philosophy” (“Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” 231). Hence, it would seem that Strauss’s denial and defence which Kennington claims to identify rest, not on proof of the contrary, but on evidence of ignorance. Modern natural science as dogmatic is to be rejected by a Socratic philosophical position, characterized as ‘weak’ or ‘zetetic’ (see Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 209). This would ultimately remain unsatisfying for critics such as Pippin and Rosen, however. As a final note, Robert D. Masters puts forth an interesting attempt to show a possible way to unification between nonteleological natural science and teleological natural right (in “Evolutionary Biology and Natural Right,” in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*). The problem with this attempt is that, as Masters admits, the unification comes “at the cost of abandoning biblical or Thomist versions of natural law” (“Evolutionary Biology and Natural Right,” 62). Masters’s solution, then, seems to rely implicitly on a solution to the theologico-political problem, namely that the account of natural law in the Bible, and as interpreted by Aquinas and later Thomists, is wrong. Strauss’s conception of zetetic philosophy ultimately disallows such a solution.

which “originate in conventions” (NRH, 94-95). From this, we can develop the tentative concept of “a life, a human life, that is good because it is in accordance with nature” (NRH, 95), in this case the natural desires and inclinations of human beings. Strauss is careful to distinguish between the *goodness* of such a life and whether that life is *just* or not, noting that “[t]he controversial issue is whether the just is good (by nature good) or whether life in accordance with human nature requires justice or morality” (NRH, 95). The tension between φύσις and νόμος, coeval with the discovery of nature, appears again in the tension between the life lived according to nature and the life lived according to convention. The naturally good life would be literally ‘beyond good and evil,’ if good and evil are merely conventional distinctions.²⁸

To reiterate the above discussion, it seems that for Strauss, ‘nature’ is a bifurcated concept, divided between ‘nature simply’ or ‘the cosmos,’ and ‘human nature.’ These two aspects, though divided, are related through the fact that humans are natural beings who dwell within the cosmos. While it may be impossible to derive a natural right for human beings from the indifferent cosmos, this does not mean that natural right is impossible *tout court*. What is important to notice is the natural condition of human beings, namely the cave of opinion sanctioned by authority. It is the fundamental problems, those which persist across all caves and whose answers are always initially determined in relation to the cave’s ‘firelight’ (the particular regime or πολιτεία), which point to the possibility of the

²⁸ We are immediately reminded of both Rousseau and Nietzsche here, both of whom resoundingly responded to that issue, respectively: that a naturally good human life a) does not require morality (Rousseau) or b) implies both the destruction and the replacement of prevailing morality (Nietzsche). Strauss is not Rousseau nor Nietzsche, but wishes to make clear that he is participating in a conversation with them, bringing their thought to bear on one of Strauss’s most important problems, the relation of ‘the city and man.’

discovery of natural right, and simultaneously to the possibility that this right will be opposed to all possible conventional right.²⁹

For Strauss, then, natural beings come to human understanding in light of the whole of which they form a part. However, as was just discussed, the character of the whole is problematic. In the first place for human beings, the whole is the cave, the particular political situation into which human beings are born/thrown and which, at least prior to philosophical investigation, sanctions understanding of natural beings. Through philosophical examination of that understanding, it is possible, for Strauss, to come to know the whole *qua* cosmos, what could be said to be nature as eternal rather than historically/politically transitory.

It is important to note here a point of convergence between Strauss and Heidegger: both thinkers view the contemporary situation of modern science's claim to understand nature, and to be the only correct understanding of nature, as a problem to be overcome. For Strauss, the problem arises through the fact that "the teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science" (NRH, 7-8). Modern science shows natural beings to be fundamentally products of chance encounters of fundamental particles, and thus lacking any sort of end towards which those beings are directed by virtue of what they are. As the

²⁹ It is interesting to note that in another book, Strauss makes the ontological claim that "Plato's work consists of many dialogues because it imitates the manifoldness, the variety, the heterogeneity of being. The many dialogues form a *kósmoj* which mysteriously imitates the mysterious *kósmoj*" (CM, 61-62). It is not clear exactly what Strauss means by this statement, and that which immediately follows, that "[t]here are many dialogues because the whole consists of many parts" (CM, 62). Here, it is arguable that Strauss collapses the distinction between human nature and nature simply, stating that the Socratic investigations into the human things which Plato presents are themselves an imitation of nature simply, or at least that the articulation of the dialogues as a whole imitates the natural articulation of the whole which, for humans, is necessarily mysterious.

above discussion has shown, this leads Strauss to hold to a “dualism,” itself problematic,³⁰ “of a nonteleological natural science and a teleological science of man,” each of which possessing a different understanding of how human beings exist in relation to nature. While not holding a dualistic conception of science like Strauss, Heidegger, at all points in his corpus, also acknowledges the problem of modern natural science viewed as the ‘final’ understanding of the *Sein* of *Seiendes*. More importantly, both thinkers’ respective positions point to the problem of nature and the necessity of its confrontation.³¹

Confronting this problem, then, Heidegger presents an understanding of nature at odds with Strauss’s bifurcated or ‘dualistic’ understanding in several ways. For the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, nature and natural beings are always understood, or possibly understood, in relation to Dasein. For the later Heidegger, nature comes to be almost synonymous with *Sein*, in the sense that nature becomes that which allows *Seiendes* to be disclosed *as Seiendes*. However, Heidegger holds throughout his corpus that nature is to be understood as something in relation to time, or, as fundamentally temporal. For Heidegger, nature cannot be anything eternal as Strauss wishes to claim.

To circumscribe Heidegger’s understanding of nature is a monumental task given the vastness of Heidegger’s writings, not to mention the immediate problem of the possibility of two distinct conceptions of nature, that of *Sein und Zeit*, and that of the later, post-*Kehre* Heidegger. However, I propose that this is half true: it seems at first that there are two different conceptions of nature in Heidegger’s thought, but they are ultimately

³⁰ “Since the lifeworld ceases to be natural at the very moment it is revealed as partial, that is, at the moment when ‘nature’ itself becomes an issue, nature always eludes—it is the fundamental problem” (McDaniel, “The Nature of Inequality: Uncovering Leo Strauss’s Idealist Ethics,” 343 n. 22).

³¹ An important difference appears with each thinker’s naming of the problem, for Strauss, “the problem of natural right” (NRH, 8), and for Heidegger, “the problem of nature” (*The Essence of Reasons*, 83). Heidegger’s lack of fundamental political consideration of nature, or Strauss’s erroneous addition of fundamental political consideration to nature, is shown in this difference.

distillable into one conception, namely that nature is always understood ontologically, and, as such, in relation to time.³² Natural beings, first and foremost, are understood as beings through their instantiation of particular modes of *Sein*. The difference between early and later Heidegger's respective conceptions of nature lies in the fundamental schism between natural beings understood in light of Dasein's projects and natural beings understood as they are in themselves, a schism which only comes fully to light in the later works. In order to narrow the task of examining this difference, I will discuss what I take to be passages indicative of Heidegger's concepts of nature from the two eras of his thinking mentioned above.

In order to understand the concept of nature contained in *Sein und Zeit*, four critical terms must be examined: 'presence-at-hand,' 'readiness-to-hand,' 'environment,' and 'World.' First, both presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) are ways of encountering beings in the world. When we encounter a being as present-at-hand, we encounter that being "within-the-world in [its] pure *outward appearance* [*Aussehen*] ($\epsilon\pi\delta\omicron\varsigma$)" (BT, 88; SZ, 61). The present-at-hand being appears before us as something to be *contemplated*. Through this contemplation, we may speak of a present-at-hand being as possessing 'properties' that are observable as aspects of the way that thing looks to us. Heidegger makes an important distinction between those beings for whom their *Sein* is an *issue* for them, and present-at-hand beings, for whom "their Being is 'a matter of indifference,' or, more precisely, they 'are' such that their Being can be neither

³² Here I disagree with Löwith, who claims that "a thinker who insists on the rigor of reflection and on care in saying will have to decide whether nature is ahistorical and merely codiscovered in our historical Being-in-the-world, or whether instead our historical world and human beings are grounded in the *physis* which brings forth everything and hence in the Being of all beings" (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 91). This passage seems to ignore the Heideggerian caveat that temporality is that ontological element which permits determination of nature as 'ahistorical,' or, alternately, the 'ground of history.' Nature is thus always understood in relation to that temporality, be it of Dasein or of *Seinsgeschichte*, the differences between their two conceptions of 'the temporal' notwithstanding.

a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite” (BT, 68; SZ, 42). Present-at-hand beings are not concerned with their *Sein*; rather, they simply *are*. Dasein’s ‘concernful relation’ to the world, arising through Dasein’s own *Sein* being an issue for it, indicates something of the character of readiness-to-hand, which will be discussed next.

A being possesses the character of readiness-to-hand if it is encountered as ‘something-in-order-to’ (*etwas um-zu*). This means that a ready-to-hand being will be encountered as something *useful*, something which exists in order to complete Dasein’s tasks or goals. As Heidegger says, such beings are “encounter[ed] in concern [as] equipment [*Zeug*]” (BT, 97, emphasis removed; SZ 68), i.e., as implements for Dasein’s use in its activities. Concern, ultimately rooted in Dasein’s *Sein* being an issue for it, allows Dasein to encounter beings as ready-to-hand. This means that a being’s readiness-to-hand is itself a ‘function’ or ‘result’ of Dasein’s mode of *Sein*. Ready-to-hand beings appear as already within the structure of Dasein’s concern, and it is only when they cease to function within that structure that they can then be known as present-at-hand (they become ‘obtrusive’ [*aufdringlich*] and thus ‘stand against’ Dasein). As equipment, ready-to-hand beings are always encountered as *for* something, and thereby possess the character of ‘manipulability’ (*Handlichkeit*), in the sense that a ready-to-hand being is determined as something that is manipulated for the sake of a project. Once this characteristic has been identified, we can see that ready-to-hand beings are determined by virtue of and in accordance with *their relation to Dasein’s projects*. Ready-to-hand beings possess no *telos* of their own; their purpose is entirely determined by the Dasein who manipulates them, or, more precisely, the projects of that Dasein. This is also shown by the structure of equipment’s *Um-zu*: in that structure “lies a reference [*Verweisung*] of something to something” (BT 97, emphasis removed; SZ, 68). Dasein is that which refers equipment to

and for a certain project, or that which refers equipment to its *Um-zu*. Dasein becomes aware of this network of assignments through circumspection (*Umsicht*). Circumspection is the activity through which Dasein encounters equipment *as* equipment, thus revealing how it is that “[d]ealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the ‘in-order-to’” (BT, 98; SZ, 69).

According to the above discussion, it seems that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are both relational in their structure: an object is present-at-hand to the knowing subject, and equipment is ready-to-hand for the sake of Dasein’s projects. Encountering objects as present-at-hand is described as a ‘founded’ mode of *Sein* for Dasein, for beings appear as present-at-hand only if they cease to function as equipment.³³ This leads Heidegger to claim that “[r]eadiness-to-hand is the way in which beings as they are ‘in themselves’ are defined ontologico-categorically” (BT, 101, emphasis removed; SZ 71).³⁴ This statement raises an important issue: does this mean that natural beings are, at least primarily/fundamentally, understood in this way, i.e., existing as equipment ready to be manipulated?

Before I attempt an answer this question, two more terms await definition: ‘environment’ and ‘World.’ ‘Environment’ (*Umwelt*) is defined as “the world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it” (BT, 94; SZ, 66). Dasein always exists within its

³³ This is not to say that *Zuhandensein* is ‘lower’ or ‘less true’ than *Vorhandensein*. Both modes of *Sein* constitute the way in which a being is disclosed to Dasein, and both are therefore ‘true’ disclosures of that being.

³⁴ King writes that “[o]ur everyday having-to-do-with things could never decree the apple tree to be handy [*Zuhandlich*] if it were not ‘in itself’ handy, at hand, and if its fruit were not ‘in itself’ handy for eating” (*A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 72). In the chapter from which this passage is drawn, King concludes that in the context of *Sein und Zeit*, readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand are the only two ways in which Dasein may encounter natural beings. As well, King notes that “even when nature is used as an ontological-categorical concept, it can only mean the being, the reality of actual or possible real beings as a whole” (*A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 53). At this point in his career, Heidegger does not consider the concept ‘nature’ to stand for *Sein*, but rather only a particular meaning of *Sein*, i.e., the being of the totality of actual natural beings that exist.

environment, which consists in its “dealings [*Umgang*] in the world and with beings within-the-world” (BT, 94, emphasis removed; SZ, 66). When beings are encountered as ready-to-hand, they are part of Dasein’s *Umgang* and hence appear within the *Umwelt*. As intimated above, when such a being is unusable, or fails to function as was anticipated, Dasein then ‘sees’ that being, or grasps that being in a particular mode of *Sein*, as present-at-hand. This occurs through circumspection, or ‘looking around’ (*Umsicht*), and through this circumspection “the environment announces itself afresh” (BT, 105; SZ, 75).³⁵ Is Dasein’s *Umwelt* then the most fundamental structure ‘surrounding’ Dasein, the most fundamental ‘site’ wherein Dasein encounters beings? No, for the *world* (*Welt*) is that phenomenon upon which the *Umwelt* is grounded. The *Welt* is the ‘site’ wherein beings find their *involvement* in Dasein’s affairs; the usability, or ‘for-which,’ of equipment arises from that equipment’s involvement in the projects that Dasein undertakes. The *Welt* is ‘where’ Dasein “always already lets beings be met as ready-to-hand” (BT, 119, translation modified; SZ, 86).³⁶ Heidegger’s passive formulation suggests that the world is that within which Dasein formulates and carries out its projects, and this formulation/carrying-out thereby allows the encountering of beings as equipment (as all formulations/carryings-out of projects *must* do, in accordance with the structure of readiness-to-hand). Dasein, in turn, “is ‘in’ the world in the sense of concerned and familiar dealings with beings encountered within-the-world” (BT, 138, translation modified; SZ, 104).³⁷ The world, to sum up, is the ‘there’ of Dasein’s ‘being-there,’ and the environment within which a particular Dasein

³⁵ The etymological connection between *Umwelt* (‘environment’), *Umgang* (‘dealings’), and *Umsicht* (‘circumspection’) is lost in translation. To put it simply, Dasein finds itself within the *Umwelt*, constituted by its own *Umgang*, of which it then is made aware through *Umsicht*.

³⁶ “...läßt je immer schon...Seiendes als Zuhandenes begegnen.”

³⁷ “...ist ‘in’ der Welt im Sinne des besorgend-vertrauten Umgangs mit dem innerweltlich begegnenden Seienden.”

finds itself, constituted by the structure of readiness-to-hand, is itself grounded in this more fundamental 'site.'

To sum up, natural beings appear within Dasein's *Welt*, but this *Welt* is fundamentally relative to Dasein. It seems, then, that the natural world, the 'whole' totality of natural beings which surround Dasein, exists as *Welt* only so long as Dasein exists, i.e., so long as Dasein provides the 'there' (*da*) in which the *Welt* can be. Heidegger discusses this problem in *The Essence of Reasons*:³⁸

...we encounter nature neither within the compass of environment nor even as something *to which* we *relate* ourselves [*wozu wir uns verhalten*]. Nature is originally manifest in Dasein because Dasein exists as situated and disposed [*befindlich-gestimmtes*] *in the midst of* beings [*Seiendem*]. But only insofar as situatedness [*Befindlichkeit*] (thrownness [*Geworfenheit*]) belongs to the essence of Dasein and is expressed in the totality of the full concept of *care* [*Sorge*] can we attain a *basis* for the *problem* of nature. (*The Essence of Reasons*, 83, translation modified, Heidegger's emphasis)

Nature is thus included within the ontological structure of Dasein's disclosure of the *Welt*, because nature as a whole receives its essential determination from the way in which Dasein encounters it.³⁹ Our understanding of nature is a function of, or subtends on, the structural features of Dasein's *Welt*, or, "that by means of in and terms of which Dasein *gives itself to understand* [*sich zu bedeuten gibt*] what beings it *can* behave toward and how it *can* relate toward them" (*The Essence of Reasons*, 85, translation modified, Heidegger's emphasis).

Heidegger hints at another possibility for nature, however. In a passage crucial for the purposes of this section, Heidegger claims that

³⁸ Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terrence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

³⁹ Contrasting the idea of nature as 'cosmos' which Strauss seems to hold, Löwith writes that for Heidegger, "...the world of Dasein is not the ordered cosmos. It is our most proximate and more distant world of human involvement (*Mitwelt*) and our environment (*Umwelt*)" ("The Nature of Man and the World of Nature for Heidegger's 80th Birthday," in *Martin Heidegger in Europe and America*, 44). This passage indicates the dependence of 'world,' and hence of 'nature,' on Dasein's ontological structure.

as the ‘environment’ is discovered, the ‘Nature’ thus discovered is met too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this ‘Nature’ itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which ‘stirs and strives,’ which assails us and as landscape takes us captive, remains hidden. The botanist’s plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the geographically determined ‘source’ [*Entspringen*] of a river is not the ‘source [*Quelle*] in the ground.’ (BT, 100, translation modified; SZ, 70)⁴⁰

We can read this passage in light of the conceptual analysis just accomplished. Nature is first discovered, or encountered, as environment. This means that natural beings are first encountered in terms of Dasein’s dealings with those beings, and thus natural beings are first discovered as ready-to-hand. Dasein may then ‘disregard’ the readiness-to-hand of natural beings. For example, an apple tree, previously regarded (as ready-to-hand) as a shady place to take a nap, a source of food, or a windbreak for one’s crops, can now be seen as present-at-hand. One then notices the colour of its leaves, the texture of its bark, or perhaps, with the right tools, its DNA structure. In this way, the tree, a natural being, would be seen as ‘pure presence-at-hand.’ However, this way of understanding the tree, this way of revealing its *Sein*, contributes nothing to an understanding of the tree as a part of ‘Nature which stirs and strives.’ When Dasein observes the tree’s qualities, even its genetic qualities, it still does not understand the tree as a living being that, initially a seed, produces *itself*, through the process of natural growth, into a tree. Even an understanding of the tree’s genetic structure does not allow Dasein to know the tree in this way. This characteristic of

⁴⁰ “Mit der entdeckten ‘Umwelt’ begegnet die so entdeckte ‘Natur.’ Von deren Seinsart als zuhandener kann abgesehen, sie selbst lediglich in ihrer puren Vorhandenheit entdeckt und bestimmt werden. Diesem Naturentdecken bleibt aber auch die Natur als das, was ‘webt und strebt,’ uns überfällt, als Landschaft gefangen nimmt, verborgen. Die Pflanzen des Botanikers sind nicht Blumen am Rain, das geographisch fixierte ‘Entspringen’ eines Flusses ist nicht die ‘Quelle im Grund.’”

natural beings ‘remains hidden’ to Dasein as long as it discloses natural beings as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand.⁴¹

We are then seemingly left with *three* ways in which to encounter natural beings under the rubric of *Sein und Zeit*: 1) as ready-to-hand, in the context of Dasein’s dealings with beings ‘for the sake of...;’ 2) as present-at-hand, as a being instantiating and bundling together a set of properties, precisely in the way that science understands natural beings; and 3) as the ‘power of Nature [*Naturmacht*],’ as self-producing beings whose character and activities, or, one could say, their *Sein*, is understood wholly *separate* from Dasein’s two ways of understanding natural beings.⁴² This separate understanding could have led to the conclusion that, as Strauss would claim, nature is *eternal*, that within which historical or timely human beings dwell. However, as Strauss critically noted, Heidegger has abandoned the notion of eternity. Temporality is only possible to understand in relation to Dasein, and hence temporality is necessarily understood as *finite* due to Dasein’s essential finitude. In another work from the same period, Heidegger claims that “the movements of nature” are “completely *time-free*” (HCT, 320, Heidegger’s emphasis), and hence nature apart from Dasein’s dealings with it is, rather than considered to be eternal, essentially *without* time. Natural beings, instantiations of ‘the power of nature,’ “are encountered ‘in’ the time which

⁴¹ Under the rubric of *Sein und Zeit*, Dreyfus writes, “Nature can be encountered only as it fits, or fails to fit, into the referential totality,” i.e., the totality of Dasein’s *Umwelt*, and goes on to state that “this is a crucial reversal of the Greek understanding” of nature as ‘ordered cosmos’ (“History of the Being of Equipment,” in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, eds. (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 183).

⁴² Dreyfus describes the third way of encountering Nature as that of “primitive peoples and Romantic poets” (*Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I*, 111). Dreyfus also notes that “[i]n his later essays, Heidegger tries to show that this...way of being of nature, which the Greeks experienced as *φύσις* and which we still sometimes experience in a noninstrumental and yet noncontemplative relation to things, has been neglected by our tradition and *cannot* be understood by reference to Dasein’s concerns” (111, author’s emphasis). It is unclear what Heidegger would make of Dreyfus’s alluding to the ancient Greeks as ‘primitive,’ or someone like Hölderlin as ‘romantic,’ but in general I follow Dreyfus’s interpretation on this point.

we ourselves are” (HCT, 320), and not encountered as instantiations or reminders of eternity.

We can tentatively conclude from above discussion, in a way that indicates a crucial difference from Strauss, that for Heidegger, nature is fundamentally an ontological term of distinction, for natural things, as things, each instantiate a particular way of *Sein*. Therefore, as “[a]ll the propositions of ontology are *Temporal propositions*” (BP, 323, Heidegger’s emphasis), even ‘the whole,’ the totality of natural beings in an ordered *kòsmoj*, can only be understood as essentially temporal and hence finite.⁴³ Nature as it is in itself is ‘time-free,’ and natural beings as we encounter them, and only as we encounter them, are ‘temporal;’ however, nature as ‘eternal’ is not possible. There is no possibility for human existence, shot through with ethical and political elements from the start, to be understood as ‘natural’ in this way. By this I mean that Heidegger’s conception of nature leaves no room for the concomitant problem of natural right, or of the possibility of the best political regime in accordance with nature.⁴⁴ Nature is a problem for the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* as much as for Strauss, but for Heidegger, the problem is definitely unsolvable.

Heidegger’s explorations concerning nature as *fŭsij*, which constitute an abandonment of the quasi-transcendental formal structure of *Sein und Zeit*, occur in a number of later works. I will reserve my discussion to a consideration of only four, all of

⁴³ Löwith understands Heidegger to elaborate, correctly, the idea of ‘cosmos’ in *The Essence of Reasons* in opposition to an ‘anthropocentric’ model, e.g., that of Christianity (cf. *The Essence of Reasons*, 99 n. 59); however, “[i]nstead of concluding...that the world, understood in a Greek manner, is primarily a world-order, it is asserted that...it is the Greek cosmos which is relative to the human Dasein” (“The Nature of Man and the World of Nature for Heidegger’s 80th Birthday,” 45). Instead of concluding that human beings are part of a ‘cosmic order’ which is greater than themselves and eternal, for Löwith Heidegger makes any understanding of that order relative to the ontologico-temporal structure of Dasein, and hence, as Dasein is, temporally finite.

⁴⁴ Compare Strauss: “All knowledge of political things implies assumptions concerning the nature of political things...[which] have the character of opinions” (WIPP, 16). If the problem of nature is unsolvable, then the opinions concerning the nature of political things cannot be replaced with knowledge of the nature of political things. Strauss’s conception of political philosophy is thus curtailed under Heidegger’s rubric.

which being indicative of the later Heidegger's conception of nature: *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935), "On the Essence and Concept of $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I" (1939), found in *Wegmarken*; "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953); and "Science and Reflection" (also 1953).

In the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Heidegger understands the Greeks to deem $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ to be the activity or process of 'emergence' (*Aufgehen*), otherwise understood as "opening up, unfolding, that which manifests itself in such unfolding and holds itself and endures in it; in short, the emerging-abiding domain [*das aufgehend-verweilende Walten*]" (IM, 14, translation modified; GA 40, 16). We are far removed here from the language of *Sein und Zeit*, as well as its 'Dasein-centric' understanding of how beings are revealed. According to Heidegger, the Greeks understood natural beings as instantiations of $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$, but $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ was not discovered through those beings. Rather, it was on the basis of "a poetic-thoughtful fundamental experience of Being [*einer dichtend-denkenden Grunderfahrung des Seins*]" (IM, 14, translation modified; GA 40, 17) which permitted the Greeks to understand natural beings in that way. Hence, Heidegger claims that " $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable" (IM, 14, translation modified; GA 40, 17)⁴⁵. But Heidegger also notes that "the Greeks name the being as such and as a whole [*das Seiende als solches im Ganzen*] $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ " (IM, 15, translation modified; GA 40, 18). The tension between these two conceptions of $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$, either $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as *Sein* or $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as *Seiende im Ganzen* indicates Heidegger's understanding concerning the difference between the fundamental Greek experience of Being as $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$, presumably by the pre-Socratics and those before, and the subsequent post-Socratic attempt to determine $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ as a particular meaning of 'the whole' or 'what is' accomplished by metaphysics—literally

⁴⁵ "Die $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ist das Sein selbst, kraft dessen das Seiende erst beobachtbar wird und bleibt."

‘beyond $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$ ’ ($\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\ \tau\alpha\ \phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\epsilon$).⁴⁶ For Heidegger, the problem is that “metaphysics precisely hides being *as such*, and remains in forgetfulness” (IM, 19, translation modified, Heidegger’s emphasis; GA 40, 21).⁴⁷ The appropriate understanding of $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$ is thereby covered over.

Heidegger also discusses $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$ in relation to $\delta\omicron\chi\alpha$, or ‘opinion.’ For Heidegger, “[δ] $\omicron\chi\alpha$ is the regard [*Ansehen*] in which one stands, in a wider sense the regard in which every being [*das jegliches Seiende*] conceals and discloses [*birgt und entbirgt*] in its look [*Aussehen*] ($\epsilon\lambda\theta\omicron\iota\eta$, $\iota\delta\upsilon\sigma\alpha$)” (IM, 104, translation modified; GA 40, 111). Hence, for Heidegger at this point, it seems that *Seiendes* appear first in relation to or conditioned by opinion. In fact, Heidegger explicitly says that “the regard in which the being now comes to stand [*jetzt zu stehen kommt*] is *Schein*” (IM 104, translation modified; GA 40, 112), and thus *Schein*, or the appearance of a *Seiende*, is contrasted with a being’s origin in the process of $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$. $\delta\omicron\chi\alpha$ and $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$ are therefore in tension; on this point, Strauss and Heidegger agree. Heidegger does not pursue what Strauss believes to be the *political* consequences of this claim, however, and instead focuses on the way in which *Seiendes* are understood as *Schein*. Heidegger notes that “it was in the Sophists and in *Plato* that appearance [*Schein*] was declared to be mere appearance and thus degraded” (IM, 106, Heidegger’s emphasis; GA 9, 113). Heidegger here follows the particular interpretation of Plato against which Strauss argues, namely that Plato claims the things of the world to be mere reproductions of the eternal Forms of which each instantiation is an imperfect copy. Heidegger wishes to emphasize that Plato, and all metaphysics which follows him, covers over the original meaning of $\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\eta$, as ‘process of appearing,’ by ‘degrading’ the way in

⁴⁶ This difference echoed in the one between $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\sigma\phi\omicron\iota\eta$ and $\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\sigma\phi\omicron\iota\alpha$ as expressed in *What is Philosophy?*; see WP, 45-51, as well as my discussion of this book in chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁴⁷ “...der Metaphysik das Sein *als solches* gerade verborgen, in der Vergessenheit bleibt...”

which beings appear as not ‘truly’ *Sein*, or not ‘truly’ what is.⁴⁸ Heidegger, and also Strauss, believes that *Seiendes* are disclosed as such in δόξα.

Four years later, Heidegger examines in detail Aristotle’s concept of φύσις found in *Physics* B, I, and this examination continues to uphold the basic ideas concerning φύσις found in the *Einführung*. Taken together, these two discussions of φύσις form the basis for the conception of nature in the later works to be examined below. Heidegger begins the essay by noting that “‘nature’ has become the fundamental word that designates essential relations [*wesentliche Bezüge*] of Western historical humanity to beings [*Seienden*], both to itself and to beings other than itself” (PM 183; GA 9, 239). ‘Nature’ thus designates the way in which human beings relate to *Seiendes*, or how human beings understand “what things are in their ‘possibility’ and how they are” (PM, 183, emphasis removed; GA 9, 239). Heidegger next lists several epochal conceptions of nature, and, importantly, ends with the conception of nature purportedly found in Hölderlin: “‘nature’ becomes the name for what is above the gods and ‘more ancient than the ages’ in which beings always come to be. ‘Nature’ becomes the word for ‘being’ [*‘Sein’*]” (PM 184; GA 9, 240). ‘Nature’ thus stands for *Sein* in the language of the poet, and, according to Heidegger, only in the language of the poet. This is a recapturing of the Greek experience of nature, prior to the beginning of philosophy, which Heidegger identifies in the *Einführung*, discussed above. ‘Nature’ as it has been understood in and by the history of philosophy has always had the meaning of the essential character or *Sein* of a *Seiende*, which for Heidegger means that

⁴⁸ According to Susan Schoenbohm, “*Phusis*...is appearing; this is an event of disclosure (*aletheia*) wherein something comes to be revealed. Yet, there is also, simultaneously, a concealing occurring” (“Heidegger’s Interpretation of *Phusis* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*,” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics*, 154). In revealing a natural being, nature as φύσις conceals itself, or conceals its ‘true’ essence. It is interesting to note that Tanguay considers this to be Strauss’s idea of the philosopher’s conception of nature: “[f]or him, the beginning of wisdom is...wonder before a nature that, at the same time, veils and unveils itself” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 171, translation modified).

nature has heretofore been understood metaphysically. Metaphysics, in this essay, is “that knowledge wherein Western historical humanity preserves the truth of its relations to beings as a whole [*Seienden im Ganzen*] and the truth about those beings themselves” (PM, 185; GA 9, 241). Metaphysics, then, is concerned with preserving the truth about the whole of nature, and subsequently must presume to understand ‘nature’ to be that whole, the order or structure of beings in which humanity finds itself. Further, metaphysics is defined as “the systematic articulation of the truth at any given time [*das Gefüge der jeweiligen Wahrheit*] ‘about’ beings as a whole” (PM, 185; GA 9, 241). For Heidegger, there is a tension here between the essentially poetic character of nature and metaphysical attempts to make that character eternally present through ‘preserving.’ It is only with due acknowledgement of the poetic conception of nature that the meaning of the *Sein* of *Seiendes* can be understood non-metaphysically. Heidegger claims that Aristotle’s *Physics* is the “foundational book of Western philosophy” (PM, 185, emphasis removed; GA 9, 242), because in it, Aristotle finally equates $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and $\omicron\upsilon\varsigma..a$, as well as determining $\omicron\upsilon\varsigma..a$ to be “stable presencing [*ständigen Anwesenung*]” (PM, 204; GA 9, 267) which indicates Aristotle’s metaphysical shift away from the pre-Socratic conception of nature. Following Heraclitus, Heidegger claims that “ $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in the way it was originally thought” (PM 229; GA 9, 300), and hence before the subsequent history of metaphysical obfuscation, is essentially a “self-concealing revealing [*sich verbergende Entbergen*]” (PM, 230; GA 9, 301). Heidegger finally again equates *Sein* and $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$, and thus posits this understanding in opposition to the series of understandings which are metaphysical. This conclusion is coherent with that of the *Einführung* discussed above.

Heidegger continues to hold this conception of nature throughout several later works. In accordance with a poetic understanding of it, nature could be encountered or

disclosed as it is wholly apart from Dasein's dealings with it. It is precisely this point that the essay "The Question Concerning Technology" elaborates. In the midst of a discussion on the nature of causation, Heidegger claims that the four ways of 'occasioning' or, more commonly, 'causation,' (*Ver-an-lassen*)⁴⁹ each of which corresponding to one of Aristotle's four causes, themselves unite and "let what is not yet present [*noch nicht Anwesende*] arrive in presencing [*ins Anwesen*]. Accordingly, they are unifiedly ruled over by a bringing that brings what is present [*Anwesendes*] into appearance" (QT, 10, translation modified; GS 7, 12). In "The Question Concerning Technology," beings are revealed through the interplay of the four ways of 'occasioning,' i.e., four ways through which the appearance of a being can come to pass as an occasion or event (*Ereignis*); there is no reference to Dasein's dealings, or Dasein's observation, here. Heidegger next quotes Plato, who, claims Heidegger, sheds some light on the nature of this 'bringing:': "Every occasion [*Veranlassung*] for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing [*Anwesen*] from that which is not presencing [*Nicht-Anwesen*] is *po..hsij*, is bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*]" (QT, 10; GS 7, 12).⁵⁰ Hence, following Plato, Heidegger is claiming that *po..hsij* is itself at the heart of 'causation,' for beings appear as present, or 'occasion,' to use a Heideggerian verbal neologism, through the form of the activity of *po..hsij*.

⁴⁹ At the root of this term is the verb '*anlassen*,' which has the meaning of letting a process continue of its own accord. Heidegger emphasizes a new understanding of natural processes here, one etymologically related to his conception of *Gelassenheit*. J. Glenn Gray notes the ethical implication of this understanding: "[w]e take care of a thing when we *let it be* in its own nature, when we permit it freedom" ("Heidegger's Course: From Human Existence to Nature," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 54, no. 8 (April 11, 1957), 204, my emphasis). Heidegger and Strauss, it must be noted, share a conception of the problem of modern natural science as possibly the final description of nature, thus securing permanently the schism between Being and the Good, or facts and values. This is "the fundamental dilemma, in whose grip we are" (NRH, 8).

⁵⁰ Speaking of the possibility to encounter nature 'poetically,' Dreyfus states that this "way of being of nature, which the Greeks experienced as *physis* and which we still sometimes experience in a noninstrumental and yet noncontemplative relation to things, has been neglected by our tradition and *cannot* be understood by reference to Dasein's concerns" (*Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, 112). My above analysis of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotelian *fÜsij* indicates Aristotle as one of the sources of this neglect; the *Einführung* indicates Plato (and the Sophists) as another.

Heidegger next states his understanding of *fŪsij* in relation to *po..hsij*:

[*f*]Ūsij also, the arising of something from out of itself (*von-sich-her Aufgehen*), is a bringing-forth, *po..hsij*. *fŪsij* is indeed *po..hsij* in the highest sense. For what is present by means of *fŪsij* (*das fŪsei Anwesende*) has the bursting open (*Aufbruch*) of bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, *in itself*. (QT, 10, translation modified, my emphasis; GS 7, 12)

This is perhaps the most important point concerning the later Heidegger's understanding of nature that I will address in this section. Heidegger here is equating *fŪsij* with the way in which a being is brought forth poetically into appearance, or occasioned. The way in which a silver chalice, to use Heidegger's example, is formed or occasioned, is of the same type or class as the way in which natural beings produce themselves. However, Heidegger goes one step further, and claims that *fŪsij* is the 'highest' form of *po..hsij*. This is because natural beings do not need help to be brought to presence; rather, they bring themselves to presence, they occasion themselves, from out of themselves (the '*her*' in *Her-vor-bringen*).

In the concluding moments of "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger classifies *art* (*tšcnh*), at this point specifically the fine arts, as a form of *po..hsij*.⁵¹ This is because art, as the ancient Greeks understood it, "was a revealing that brought forth and hither [*ein her-und vor-bringendes Entbergen*], and therefore belonged with *po..hsij*" (QT, 34; GS 7, 35). The work of art is thus an occasioning, a bringing-forth of a being to presence where, previously, there was none. Heidegger claims that "the poetic [*Dichterische*] brings the true [*Wahre*] into the splendour of what Plato in the *Phaedrus* calls *ἄκφανσταν*, that which shines forth most purely [*das am reinsten*

⁵¹ It seems that at this point Heidegger fulfills a promissory note to present a "consideration" that shows "the essential Same [*das wesentlich Selbe*]" found in both *fŪsij* and *tšcnh*, expressed here as the concept of *po..hsij*; cf. IM, 16; GA 40, 19.

Hervorscheinende^{52]}” (QT, 34, translation modified; GS 7, 36). Hence, poetic, or ‘poietic,’ artworks, as occasionings, allow *das Wahre* to reveal itself in the most appropriate way that human beings can accomplish.⁵³

The ‘true,’ the truth concerning beings, ‘shines forth’ in the poetic artwork. This has important consequences when seen in light of Heidegger’s previous claims concerning $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$. If $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ is the highest form of $\rho\omicron\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\sigma$, then $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ must be the purest way that *das Wahre* can *hervorscheinen*. This also means that poetic artworks, as examples of $\rho\omicron\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\sigma$, show the nature of $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ in the ‘truest’ way possible. If the artisan treats and puts forth his or her work as an instantiation of $\rho\omicron\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\sigma$, in the way Heidegger understands it, he or she will recognize that he or she is merely *participating* in the bringing-forth of a being into presence, and hence is merely one way of an ‘occasioning.’ If the artisan also recognizes $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ as another form of $\rho\omicron\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\sigma$, *recognizes their identical essence*, any poetic artworks produced in emulation of the self-production of natural beings would allow for the occurrences of $\mu\acute{\alpha}\kappa\eta\nu\acute{\sigma}\tau\alpha\tau\alpha$,⁵⁴ and would allow the ‘true’ concerning those natural beings to ‘shine forth most purely.’ The Heidegger of “The Question Concerning Technology,” then, likens $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ to any art that shares the character of $\rho\omicron\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\sigma$. Nature is thus conceived to have a poetic essence in the sense elucidated in the discussion of the ‘Nature which stirs

⁵² The etymological connection to *her-vor-bringen* is readily apparent.

⁵³ For Heidegger, “[w]e may say that ‘nature’ in whatever sense is most significant for human beings is exhibited better in poetry, or in Hölderlin’s poetry, than in science” (Ward, *Heidegger’s Political Thinking*, 229).

⁵⁴ Of course, just because an artisan recognises the character of poetic artworks concerning $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\sigma$ does not mean that he or she would be able to accomplish such an artwork. He or she would have to be of the level of Hölderlin, or, for that matter, Homer, artisans who, by Heidegger’s estimation, revealed a particular way of *Sein* to a particular people and thus shaped a particular historical epoch. For Stanley Rosen, this form of thinking is not the equivalent of poetry, but rather *prophecy* (see *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*, 130). With this we can understand better Strauss’s accusations in “Existentialism” of the later Heidegger’s thought being ‘religious’ in character. The language of the prophetic poet, or the poetic prophet, and the language of the philosopher stand in opposition.

and strives' from *Sein und Zeit*; further, poetic artworks reveal the 'truth' of natural beings, namely, that artworks and natural beings are essentially productions of *po..hsij*.

In "Science and Reflection," Heidegger notes that *fÜSij* is a form of 'doing,' in the sense that 'growth' (*Wachstum*), or 'the holding-sway of nature' (*Walten der Natur*) is itself a *Her-vor-bringen* that brings forth a being into *Anwesen* (QT, 159; GS 7, 43⁵⁵). Heidegger makes the claim that *fÜSij* is itself a form of 'work' (*wirken*), which, through Heidegger's German etymological excursions, persists as the root word of *Wirklichkeit*, or 'reality.' Forms of work share the common characteristic of production or *Her-vor-bringen*, and this characteristic persists whether "something brings itself forth from hither into presencing by itself or whether the bringing hither and forth of something is accomplished by humanity" (QT, 160, translation modified; GS 7, 43).⁵⁶ Both human-made artifacts and natural beings are productions; the distinction between the two occurs when one realizes that products of *fÜSij*, natural beings, bring *themselves* into presencing.⁵⁷

I will now attempt to interweave these four Heideggerian claims concerning *fÜSij*, in the hopes that a tentative 'later Heideggerian concept of nature' may be pinned down. "The Question Concerning Technology" claims that *fÜSij* is a form of *po..hsij*, and that poetic artworks allow the 'true' to 'shine forth most purely.' It was concluded above that poetic artworks thus allow the truth of *fÜSij* to shine forth most purely, i.e., poetic artworks reveal nature as *po..hsij*. This is because, as Heidegger as shown, *po..hsij* brings

⁵⁵ "FÜSij ist qšSij: von sich aus etwas vor-legen, es her-stellen, her- und vor-bringen, nämlich ins Anwesen."

⁵⁶ "...etwas sich von sich aus her ins Anwesen vor-bringt...[oder] der Mensch das Her- und Vor-bringen von etwas leistet."

⁵⁷ Emphasizing the temporal aspect of human disclosure of natural beings, Thomas Sheehan writes that for Heidegger, "beings to the degree that they are 'natural' (*physei on*) are intrinsically self-presentative, that is, accessible and intelligible—*on hos alethes*—even if that accessibility and intelligibility is always shot through with *finitude*" ("Reading a Life: Heidegger and Hard Times," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 81, my emphasis).

beings to presence, $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ is the ‘highest’ form of this activity, and both natural beings and poetic artworks are produced through, fundamentally, the same way of *Sein*-revealing. “Science and Reflection” claims that $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ is a form of ‘doing,’ for through its work (*wirken*) $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ brings forth beings into reality (*Wirklichkeit*). According to “On the Essence and Concept of $\text{F}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ in Aristotle’s *Physics* B, I,” the term ‘ $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ ’ is a particular meaning of *Sein*, one which stands altogether separately from the meaning of *Sein* for modern science.⁵⁸ In the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Heidegger discusses how the history of metaphysics starting with Plato has ‘promoted’ the ‘highest’ understanding of *Sein* as that which is permanent, the forms or ideas, of which individual *Seiendes* are mere copies. This comes at the expense of a degradation of the way in which beings appear, i.e., the process of $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$. Heidegger, in opposition to the history of metaphysics, thus wishes to retrieve the pre-Socratic understanding of $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$ as designating a particular meaning of *Sein*, one that is constituted by the activity of $\text{po}\ddot{\text{h}}\text{Sij}$ that ‘works’ to bring natural beings into presence, thereby allowing the truth of those beings to shine forth most purely, as they ‘really’ (*wirklich*) are.

Even with the drastic change in language and emphasis, the later Heidegger still holds nature to be understood originally in an ontological fashion. For Heidegger, natural beings appear to us in the first place in a particular way of *Sein*, either in the context of *Dasein*’s projects or in the way that they are as instantiations of $\text{f}\ddot{\text{U}}\text{Sij}$. This is the case

⁵⁸ Ward clearly identifies the later Heidegger’s understanding of nature, in perhaps its most extreme consequence: “[n]ature...is above or before all actual things, including the gods, but is not such as some ‘separated region of reality.’ Rather, it is the *site* in which the gods can appear” (*Heidegger’s Political Thinking*, 232, my emphasis). This interpretation disallows those derived from possible ambiguities in the language of *Sein und Zeit*, as Steven Crowell identifies. In discussion of the possible ‘ground’ of *Dasein*, “Heidegger sometimes suggests that it be conceived as ‘nature’ (or ‘cosmos’), as the *Übermüchtige*—which leads, perhaps, to some form of theological conception” (“Conscience and Reason: Heidegger and the Grounds of Intentionality,” in *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. Stephen Crowell and Jeff Malpas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 56). The later Heidegger thus seeks a ground even more originary than that of the divine.

even when *dōxai* are treated philosophically. Heidegger thus misses the political element of the way in which *Seiendes* appear for human beings. Conversely, to claim that beings first appear ‘naturally’ in the context of a particular political situation is, for Heidegger, a disregarding of the ontological difference between *Seiendes* and *Sein*. If the political understanding of nature is considered to be first for human beings, there is a confusion of holding a particular ontic meaning, that of politics or the political, to stand for the ontological meaning of nature. Strauss’s and Heidegger’s respective conceptions of nature each presume the other to be mistaken, as from the perspective of each, the other considers natural beings from a mistaken philosophical starting point.⁵⁹ However, there is a structural similarity between the two conceptions. For both Heidegger and Strauss, beings appear in a particular way, and in that appearing, or, one could say, as a function of that appearing which cannot be surpassed,⁶⁰ their essential nature is hidden. For Strauss, on the one hand, the essential nature of beings must be extracted from philosophical examination of the opinions about them; for Heidegger, on the other, the realm of opinion concerning beings is

⁵⁹ For Gregory Bruce Smith, Strauss makes the mistake that “the possibility of political philosophy required the recovery of the ‘idea of nature,’” which Smith is quick to distinguish from the “‘phenomenon of nature’” (*Between Eternities: On the Tradition of Political Philosophy, Past, Present, and Future* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 615 n. 23). This distinction is grounded in the idea that “an ‘idea’...is static, not subject to change...[while a ‘phenomenon’] is dynamic and has a strong element of Heidegger’s understanding of *physis*” (*Between Eternities*, 615-616 n. 23). It is unclear, however, if Smith here means to criticize Strauss’s conception of ‘idea’ as a fundamental *problem*, the responses to which changing in accordance with the vicissitudes of history. Smith claims that “we should not *initially* label the Greek phenomena or our own as either natural or conventional; they just are, they just show themselves” (*Between Eternities*, 52). This comment, one that can be seen as a suggestion for a phenomenology of nature, serves to inform the discussion in the next section below. However, Strauss holds that the distinction between natural and conventional only arises with the rise of philosophy. Before this time, the distinction did not exist. If we are to conduct a philosophical investigation, then, by Strauss’s lights we must hold this distinction to be fundamental. It is unclear how Smith’s suggestion for the abandonment of the distinction when investigating natural beings results in anything other than the circumvention of the activity of philosophy as Strauss understands it.

⁶⁰ By this I mean that it is part of the essence of human beings that beings appear in a particular way; there is no way to achieve the position of God-like wisdom concerning beings, i.e., the ‘view from nowhere.’ Strauss’s and Heidegger’s quasi-Kantian position concerning the *Ding-an-sich* is evident here (cf. Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 125-126 and 158-160). The crucial difference is that for Strauss, such knowledge is the end of philosophy and therefore must be, or must be considered to be as a presupposition, attainable.

to be disregarded for the sake of philosophy's commencement. It is necessary therefore to examine each thinker's respective conception of first philosophy, i.e., the point or moment at which philosophy must begin and the objects which it must first consider. It is to this subject which I now turn.

3.3.2 Strauss's and Heidegger's Respective Conceptions of 'First Philosophy'

The conception of what counts as 'first philosophy'⁶¹ is interrelated with that of nature, for, ostensibly, it is the nature of the matter of philosophical inquiry which determines the method or endeavour by which that matter is understood. Heidegger argues that this is precisely the unrecognized problem in late modernity: nature or the totality of beings, since the time of Plato, has been understood primarily in the way that that which is eternally present is 'highest' or 'most real.' In our late modern epoch, Heidegger claims that this results in the technological meaning of beings (as *Bestand*, beings as constant 'standing-reserve' awaiting exploitation) as perhaps the final understanding of *Sein*. Heidegger believes that phenomenology (early Heidegger) or poetic *Denken* (later Heidegger) allow *Seiendes* to show themselves in their *Sein* as they themselves would show themselves, hence without an interpretative framework. Concerned as it is above all with the meaning of *Sein* in general, as opposed to the merely metaphysical meaning of the *Sein* of *Seiendes*, philosophy is, from the start, ontology. Strauss, conversely, believes Heidegger's approach itself to be a framework like other modern conceptions, as

⁶¹ It is important at the outset to note that the term 'first philosophy' is ambiguous: it could mean either the necessary starting point of philosophical activity, or the 'highest' form of philosophical activity. For both Heidegger and Strauss, I believe that both meanings are applicable. This belief informs the following discussion.

Heideggerian phenomenology abstracts from the way in which beings appear to us first, i.e., in the context of political life.⁶² Strauss argues that first philosophy must indeed be political philosophy, but understood in a very particular way. I will begin this section by discussing how Strauss understands political philosophy to be first philosophy, and then contrast this understanding with Heidegger's claim that ontology, rather, is the domain of the questions which are first for human beings.

Strauss addresses the question of the essence of political philosophy in an essay entitled, appropriately enough, "What Is Political Philosophy?" In this essay, he defines both philosophy more generally (its task is "to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole" (WIPP, 11)) and political philosophy (its task is "truly to know both the nature of political things and the right, or good, political order" (WIPP, 12)). To understand Strauss's position, it is important to consider his distinction concerning *nature* and *convention*, shown through the distinction between truth and opinion. Philosophy begins with opinions, the opinions concerning the highest or first things that comprise a particular political situation or regime.⁶³ Philosophy thus begins with conventional opinions. As was stated in the last section, each opinion is a part of a natural articulation of the whole which presents itself as the originary source of truth for human beings. This natural articulation, though, is itself conventional, or, more precisely, the content of the

⁶² "Fundamental ontology may therefore be termed an abstraction from every possible world. It explains only the most general way in which worlds come into being, and nothing concrete about what they become—French, German, Russian, or American" (Waller R. Newell, "Heidegger on Freedom and Community: Some Political Implications of His Early Thought," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 1984), 777.

⁶³ For Strauss, claims Kennington, "[p]hilosophy, as distinct from other human activities, stands or falls by its relatedness to the first things" ("Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," 241. The fundamental question, one towards which both Heidegger and Strauss direct their energies, is 'how are those 'first things' fundamentally disclosed to human beings?' I will discuss this below.

articulation is conventional (the form, for Strauss, is eternal and hence natural⁶⁴). If this is the case, then philosophy is necessarily political philosophy from the start, as it must start with the conventional, or political, answers to natural, or eternal, questions. It is only when the philosopher realizes that all conventional answers point to the problems which they attempt to solve, and that such problems have persisted since their discovery by Socrates, who “is said to have been the first who called philosophy down from heaven” (NRH, 120), that philosophy as Strauss understands it is possible.⁶⁵

Political philosophy begins by examining the opinions of the particular political situation, and yet, as was quoted in the last section, “[t]he opinions are...seen to be fragments of the truth, soiled fragments of the pure truth” (NRH, 124). I believe this to mean not that opinions are to be ‘added together’ or computed in some way to arrive at an understanding of the whole, but rather that recognition of the myriad of opinions and the fact that they are mutually contradictory allows one to understand the problems to which each opinion is meant to be a response, thereby also allowing an understanding of the natural structure of philosophical questioning for human beings.⁶⁶ For Strauss, philosophy

⁶⁴ This is because for Strauss, the structure of the whole, what he calls (following Plato) the structure of ideas, are themselves the “fundamental problems” (NRH, 32) concerning human beings, the problems which philosophy attempts to answer. Strauss thus opposes a metaphysical interpretation of the Platonic ideas.

⁶⁵ Here we see that Strauss aligns himself with Socrates against the pre-Socratic philosophers, those whom Heidegger considers to stand in a sense ‘before,’ and thus ‘greater than,’ philosophy (“Heraclitus and Parmenides were not yet ‘philosophers.’ Why not? Because they were the greater thinkers [*größeren Denker*]” (WP, 53)). Also drawing attention to this distinction, Strauss claims the pre-Socratics to have exemplified “madness,” and that “[i]n contrast to his predecessors, [Socrates] did not separate wisdom from moderation” (NRH, 123). Leo Robertson claims that as a result of Strauss’s notion that “[t]he ‘originary’ encounter is...not for the human as *Dasein*, but for the human as citizen, as a certain ‘type’ structured by a shared moral and political life,” he “turns not to the poetic musings of pre-Socratic poets and philosophers, but to the dialectical rationalism of Plato” (“Leo Strauss’s Platonism”, 36). The difference between Heidegger’s and Strauss’s respective view of pre-Socratic philosophy indicates each thinker’s respective understanding of the priority of political life in the structure of human experience.

⁶⁶ “Philosophy is motivated by the recognition both of the fact of opinions and the manifest inadequacy of opinions. The opinions are multiple, internally inconsistent, and incomplete. The problem in the surface [‘of things;’ cf. TM, 13—DT] is the duality of human opinion—open to the whole and yet falling short of giving us knowledge of the whole. That recognition sets in motion the task of philosophy, which is examination and transcendence of opinion” (Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political*

proper begins with the philosophical examination of political things because this is the natural starting point for investigation into the whole: the whole is articulated in conventional terms to human beings, so this articulation must be in some way political. Human beings are, in the first place, enmeshed within an evaluative, political/ethical structure, albeit, as was discussed previously, a conventional one. Strauss, identifying what he holds to be the Socratic method, states that “[p]hilosophy consists...in the ascent from opinions to knowledge or to the truth, in an ascent that may be said to be guided by opinions” (NRH, 124). It is only through recognizing that opinions concerning the whole and the good are answers to questions that one can ascend beyond those opinions to contemplation of the questions themselves. Strauss indicates this in the following passage:

[a]ll knowledge, however limited or ‘scientific,’ presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which knowledge is possible. All understanding presupposes a fundamental awareness of the whole: prior to any perception of particular things, the human soul must have had a vision of the ideas, a vision of the articulated whole. However much the comprehensive visions which animate the various societies may differ, they are all visions of the same—of the whole. Therefore, they do not merely differ from, but contradict one another. This very fact forces man to realize that each of these visions, taken by itself, is merely an opinion about the whole or an inadequate articulation of the fundamental awareness of the whole and thus points beyond itself towards an adequate articulation. (NRH, 125)

The inadequacy of each ‘vision,’ the sum total of the guiding principles of the particular regime into which one is born, points human beings toward the life of attempting to arrive at an adequate articulation of the whole, i.e., the life of the quest for wisdom. However, “[t]here is no guaranty that the quest for adequate articulation will ever lead beyond an understanding of the fundamental alternatives or that philosophy will ever legitimately go

Philosophy and American Democracy (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 148-149). For Strauss, the ‘transcendence’ of philosophy never implies total abandonment of the conventional horizon in which the particular philosopher finds him- or herself, however, both for the reason of philosophy’s political moderation, and for the reason that without opinion as that which orients philosophical activity, philosophers are left in the ‘void’ of total, as opposed to zetetic, skepticism (cf. NRH, 124).

beyond the stage of discussion or disputation and will ever reach the stage of decision” (NRH, 125).

For Strauss, “Socrates...viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole” (WIPP, 38-39). The whole is mysterious because the natural articulation of the whole, which as first for politically-enmeshed humans is, it must be remembered, essentially *conventional*, contains within it an account of the origins of the whole. The natural articulation asserts that the (ultimately conventional) origin of the whole depends on what Strauss calls ‘the ancestral,’ and “[p]rephilosophic life is characterized by the primeval identification of the good with the ancestral” (NRH, 83). Strauss next claims that “one cannot reasonably identify the good with the ancestral if one does not assume that the ancestors were absolutely superior to ‘us,’ and this means that they were superior to all ordinary mortals; one is driven to believe that the ancestors, or those who established the ancestral way, were gods or sons of gods or at least ‘dwelling near the gods’” (NRH, 83-84). Thus, Strauss concludes that for prephilosophical life, “the right way [i.e., the basis upon which human beings comport themselves toward the world—DT] must be a divine law” (NRH, 84). The natural prephilosophical articulation of the whole asserts that the whole’s origin is to be venerated as divine.⁶⁷ As was discussed in the last section, for Strauss each political regime, or, following Strauss’s understanding of Plato, each cave, possesses an account of its origin which postulates, explicitly or implicitly, the divine status

⁶⁷ It is important to note here that the prephilosophical, and hence conventional, articulation of the whole asserts the *reverence* of the origin of the whole as divine, not that the origin *is* in fact divine. As Alexander S. Duff states, “Strauss...does not hold that the pronouncements [of the law, those ‘highest opinions’ which form the basis of the conventional articulation of the whole—DT] are themselves divine; rather, he holds that they are political in their source” (“Stanley Rosen’s Critique of Leo Strauss,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 63 (March 2010), 638). Duff evinces this with Strauss’s claim that “the city looks up to, holds in reverence, ‘holds’ the gods of the city” (CM, 20).

of that origin.⁶⁸ The problem of this mysterious, possibly divine origin of the conventional opinions concerning the fundamental problems is given expression in Strauss's guiding question, the theologico-political problem.⁶⁹ For Strauss, one can say that all of his writings return to, or at least point back to, this fundamental guiding problem. This problem, evidently Socratic in origin (NRH, 120ff.), is concerned with the relation of human beings to the whole in which they find themselves, and thus both human beings and the whole, as well as the relation between them, are *the* subjects of philosophical examination. For Socrates, and, we can say, for Strauss, "to articulate the situation of man means to articulate man's openness to the whole" (WIPP, 39). Human beings are the radically open creatures, in the sense that it is only they, so far as we know, who have an understanding of the whole, an understanding that is problematic. And, as philosophy begins with politically-derived conventional opinions concerning the whole, this understanding must also be, at least in the first place, related to politics. Cosmology and politics, as objects of philosophical examination, dovetail in the theologico-political problem. Due to humanity's openness to the whole being problematic, cosmology in the Socratic sense will always be "a quest for cosmology rather than a solution to the cosmological problem" (WIPP, 39). Philosophy is, quite possibly, quixotic through and through, and there is no evident legitimate end to philosophical activity.

⁶⁸ There is an interesting analogous relation here with Jacques Derrida's claim that the foundation of law is always "mystical," because "[s]ince the origin of authority, the founding or grounding, the positing of the law cannot be definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground" (Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Mary Quaintance (New York: Routledge, 2002), 242). The glaring difference between the two thinkers is that Derrida, following Heidegger, believes it not to be possible to discover *the* just political regime (or *the* correct understanding of the whole); for Derrida, "deconstruction is justice" (*Acts of Religion*, 243, emphasis removed). Strauss, conversely holds the question open.

⁶⁹ Heinrich Meier defines this problem succinctly: "the grounding of political philosophy and the confrontation with faith and revelation are two sides of one and the same endeavour" (*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, xi).

However, this does not mean that philosophy must be permanently sceptical, in the sense of the dogmatic withholding of judgement in the Pyrrhonic sense. Rather, philosophy must be *zetetic*⁷⁰: “[p]hilosophy as such is nothing but awareness of the problems, i.e., of the fundamental and comprehensive problems” (OT, 196). The philosopher attempts to become aware of the fundamental problems, a particular set of answers to all of which finally constituting an ‘adequate articulation of the whole.’ However, such an answer is impossible philosophically, for “the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the ‘subjective certainty’ of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution” (OT, 196). Philosophy, as Strauss understands it, cannot reach an end to its quest. Nevertheless, “[t]he unfinishable character of the quest for the adequate articulation of the whole does not entitle one...to limit philosophy to the understanding of a part, however important. For the meaning of a part depends on the meaning of the whole” (NRH, 125-126). For Strauss, philosophy will always remain a quest to develop an adequate articulation of the whole, one that will always remain unfinished just as humanity’s openness to and place within the whole will always remain problematic.⁷¹

However, the *zetetic* character of philosophy, if understood specifically or essentially as cosmology or ontology, presents a problem if we reconsider Strauss’s definition of political philosophy quoted above. If political philosophy is the quest for the right, or good political order, does the *zetetic* character of philosophy circumvent such a quest from the start? If the whole can never be known fully, how can a good political order

⁷⁰ Strauss defines it thusly: “...zetetic, or skeptical in the original sense of the term” (OT, 196).

⁷¹ Tanguay notes succinctly that as a result of this conception, “Strauss proposes only a *weak* defence of philosophy, a *zetetic* defence: philosophy is the best life because it conceives of the best life as the search for the answer to the question ‘What is the best life?’” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 209).

that reflects the character of the whole be discovered? In order to address this problem, we must examine Strauss's dualistic conception of knowledge, namely that knowledge is characterized through the difference between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Philosophy's task is to discover knowledge of the whole, but the whole is mysterious and elusive; however, we do have "partial knowledge of parts" (WIPP, 39) of the whole. On the one hand, we have knowledge of a homogeneous character, which finds its archetype in arithmetic: knowledge of what is the same at all times and at all places. On the other, we have knowledge of heterogeneity, characterized by the heterogeneous character of human ends. Thus, heterogeneous knowledge finds its archetype in the knowledge of "the statesman and the educator" (WIPP, 39). Strauss considers the second kind of knowledge, knowledge of heterogeneity, as superior to that of homogeneity, for the reason that "as the knowledge of the ends of human life, it is knowledge of what makes human life complete or whole; it is therefore knowledge of a whole" (WIPP, 39). This whole is, for Strauss, the human soul, which is "the only part of the whole which is open to the whole and therefore more akin to the whole than anything else is" (WIPP, 39).⁷² Strauss calls knowledge of the ends of human life "the political art in the highest sense" (WIPP, 39). Philosophy, in its quest to discover the truth of the whole, produces, one might add almost as a side effect, the highest form of political knowledge, due to philosophy's discovery of knowledge of human ends. From this knowledge, the best possible political regime at a given particular time would be discernable. Thus, for Strauss, political philosophy, understood as the attempt to discover the best political order, is seemingly both coherent and concomitant with

⁷² This claim's Socratic character, the idea that the character of the whole is reflected in the character of the human soul, cannot be missed. It possibly becomes less tendentious if we consider that openness to the whole merely means to be receptive to what for Strauss are the fundamental problems inherent in human existence, those that are the same at all times and at all places. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 434d1-435a2.

philosophy simply, i.e., ontology or cosmology understood as the attempt to discover the truth of the whole.

This being said, there is still a problematic relation between knowledge of homogeneity and knowledge of heterogeneity. For philosophical activity to conclude, to attain that which it seeks, there would have to be a combination of political knowledge and knowledge of homogeneity, i.e., a combination of knowledge of particular, historical human ends and knowledge of that which is not particular and historical, or that which is universal and eternal.⁷³ Strauss is saying here that the discovery of the best political regime *tout court*, the best regime according to nature, is not possible, because knowledge of nature is itself an unfinished and unfinishable project. The dualism inherent in knowledge is permanent for Strauss. This has not stopped attempts to “force the issue by imposing unity on the phenomena, by absolutizing either knowledge of homogeneity or knowledge of ends” (WIPP, 40). As a result, what seemed above to be the concordant relation between political philosophy and philosophy proper becomes fraught.⁷⁴ Strauss temporarily sheds his typically reserved manner and describes the origin of this imposition, as well as how philosophy avoids it, rather poetically:

[m]en are constantly attracted and deluded by two opposite charms: the charm of competence which is engendered by mathematics, and the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences. Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm. It is the highest form of the mating of courage and moderation. In spite of its highness or nobility, it could appear as Sisyphean or

⁷³ As Ward notes, “[t]he perfect combination or synthesis of these two sorts of knowledge is wisdom” (“Political Philosophy and History,” 294-295), that which the philosopher seeks and that, claims the Straussian zetetic, results in dogmatism if it is claimed to have been found. It is possible to understand Strauss’s constant debate with Kojève as arising from this distinction between philosophy on the one hand and the possession of wisdom on the other. Strauss also notes that possession of wisdom requires “the universal and homogeneous state” (OT, 210). Strauss’s language implicitly repeats the tension between knowledge of homogeneity and knowledge of heterogeneity, and the problematic attempt to unify the two, discussed above.

⁷⁴ See Strauss’s warning about philosophy as ‘edifying,’ quoted in n. 4 above.

ugly, when one contrasts its achievement with its goal. Yet it is necessarily accompanied, sustained, and elevated by *eros*. It is graced by nature's grace.⁷⁵
(WIPP, 40)

Leaving aside an analysis of the obviously enthusiastic language, we can see that, in what Strauss diagnoses as the danger of collapsing the two forms of knowledge, which may also be called, respectively, theory and praxis, we may find Strauss's conception of specifically modern philosophy as opposed to ancient philosophy. For Strauss, modern philosophy does not hold firmly apart the two forms of knowledge, theoretical and practical, and this is "the root of all modern darkness" (FPP, 66). Modern philosophy presents an "obscuring" of this difference, and this "first leads to a reduction of praxis to theory (this is the meaning of so-called rationalism) and then, in retaliation, to the rejection of theory in the name of a praxis that is no longer intelligible as praxis" (FPP, 66). We are thus left with two decisions in modernity, and each reflects Strauss's identification of the difference between knowledge of heterogeneity and knowledge of homogeneity: 1) the decision for either 'competence' or 'humble awe' concerning human existence, and 2) the decision for either theoretical or practical knowledge as the best way to understand human existence.⁷⁶

Heidegger, for Strauss "the most radical historicist" (WIPP, 27) and hence the most radical modern, seems to have chosen the second option in both decisions: the reduction of philosophy to 'humble awe' before the mysterious character of human existence, and the subsequent rejection of any theoretical attempt to discover a permanent nature of that character. This is what Strauss indicates when he says that radical historicism, for Strauss

⁷⁵ Note that Strauss here says nothing about that other, perhaps more commonly-held origin of grace, God.

⁷⁶ "We can say, even in the absence of certainty with regard to the character of the synthesis of the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, that the whole, which contains or exhibits both homogeneity and heterogeneity, is thereby heterogeneous. A defective manner of recognition of this fundamental heterogeneity takes openness to heterogeneity or the refusal to succumb to either sort of charm as Nietzschean creativity or as acceptance of the impossibility of philosophy. The error lies in the belief that in the absence of a complete conceptualization of the whole in terms of homogeneity we are left with the poetic creation of conventions or worlds as our only alternative" (Ward, "Political Philosophy and History," 295).

most clearly and deeply expressed in the thought of Heidegger, can be understood as “explicitly condemning to oblivion the notion of eternity” (WIPP, 55). This rejection permits the collapse of theory and praxis into each other in favour of praxis, and therefore in favour of the conception of philosophy as investigation into the transient or historical and the concomitant rejection of the eternal as possible to discover or understand.⁷⁷ This leads to a further problem for political philosophy. For Strauss’s Heidegger, “there is no essential necessity for raising the question of the good society,” for “this question is not in principle coeval with man; its very possibility is the outcome of a mysterious dispensation of fate” (WIPP, 26). In other words, the question of *the* good political order cannot be asked due to the lack of a permanent and stable structure of human existence. In fact, even the asking of this question is itself a remnant of a particular dispensation of fate, namely the dispensation which resulted in the claim that the highest meaning of *Sein* is to be always present—the claim written down at a particular time in history by Plato.

By contrast, Strauss states plainly that

[p]hilosophy in the strict and classical sense is the quest for the eternal order or for the eternal cause or causes of all things. It presupposes then that there is an eternal and unchangeable order within which History takes place and which is not in any way affected by History. It presupposes, in other words, that any ‘realm of freedom’ is not more than a dependent province within the ‘realm of necessity.’ (“Restatement on Xenophon’s *Hiero*,” JPCM, 471)⁷⁸

⁷⁷ It is this rejection, claims Strauss, that led Heidegger “in 1933 to submit to, or rather to welcome, as a dispensation of fate, the verdict of the least wise and least moderate part of his nation while it was in its least wise and least moderate mood, and at the same time to speak of moderation and wisdom” (“WIPP?,” 27). For Strauss, if the notion of eternity is eliminated, the notion that there can be *the* just political regime which is the best at all times and in all places, it seems, if pushed to Strauss’s understanding of the extreme, that all that is left are *Völker* rooted in their *Blut und Boden*. See chapter 1 of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of Strauss’s understanding of Heidegger’s choice for Nazism.

⁷⁸ This is a passage from the last paragraph of Strauss’s *On Tyranny*, left out of the first English edition and reinstated in the second; cf. OT, 212. It is described by Kenneth Hart Green as “the closest thing we possess to a metaphysical confession of faith by Strauss” (JPCM, 472, n.1). It is also interesting to note Strauss’s critical allusion to Heidegger at the end of the paragraph, and hence the end of the book: Strauss and Kojève “both apparently turned away from Being to Tyranny because we have seen that those who lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny, who therefore *et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*, were forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely because they did nothing but talk of Being” (“Restatement on

For Strauss, then, Heidegger's thought begins wrongly, for asking the question of *Sein* as the guiding principle of philosophical investigation lacks the understanding that any answer to such a question requires as a propaedeutic an examination of the conventional understanding of beings, one legislated by the prevailing political regime. As Strauss remarks, "philosophy, being an attempt to rise from opinion to science, is necessarily related to the sphere of opinion as its essential starting point, and hence to the political sphere" (WIPP, 92).⁷⁹ The activity of philosophy is dependent on the realm of the political as a source for the possible truths which it can discover.

Heidegger would disagree strongly with Strauss's position that the political situation is the ultimate source of a 'natural articulation' of beings or the whole. Heidegger believes that politics or 'the political' are themselves notions derived from a particular reigning conception of *Sein*, and hence to proceed in the proper direction and from the proper starting position, the question of the meaning of that *Sein* must be addressed first. For Heidegger, the 'sphere of opinion,' in the language of *Sein und Zeit*, *das Man*, is that sphere of existence which is to be escaped in order to make authentic, resolute decisions.

Xenophon's *Hiero*," JPCM, 472). Strauss intimates his understanding of the fundamental connection between ontology and politics here, in the sense that one cannot speak of the issue of Being without also considering the issue of Tyranny, which leads automatically to the issue of justice or the Good. For Strauss, Being and the Good, as objects of philosophical investigation, are always and must always be understood together. This claim seemingly contradicts the image of Strauss which I have been outlining thus far, one which holds that theory and practice must be kept separate. The simultaneity of and yet separation between theory and practice is connected to Strauss's conception of the distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric, to be discussed in the next section of this chapter. In *On Tyranny*, Strauss also indicates that his difference from Kojève depends on Strauss's presupposition of an eternal and unchangeable order. Strauss implies that Kojève recognizes this question and responds to it, thereby understanding the political issue at stake, while Heidegger does not recognize it and is therefore blind to the political issue.

⁷⁹ Richard Velkley writes that in Strauss's view, Heidegger "conflates the suprahistorical with the historical, or the philosopher's being at home in the world with the various ways of being at home in human affairs, in which the philosopher can never entirely be at home. For Strauss this entails that Heidegger does not recognize the natural duality of the human—the duality that Strauss sees as the permanent condition of the human" ("On the Roots of Rationalism," 256). Heidegger would respond by saying that there is no such thing as the 'suprahistorical,' that any conception of transcendence beyond one's historical position constitutes a remnant of Platonic onto-theology.

Hence, for Heidegger, philosophical activity only begins in the ‘sphere of opinion’ negatively, in order to indicate that against which philosophical activity will make claims.⁸⁰ The common-sense view of the world thus holds little philosophical value.⁸¹ I will now turn to *Sein und Zeit* in order to determine Heidegger’s conception of first philosophy, and show how such a conception also explicitly critiques the notion of ‘common sense,’ the essence of the political aspect of human life and that on which Strauss’s conception of philosophy depends as a source for truth. Following this discussion, I will briefly show how the conception of ‘first philosophy’ found in *Sein und Zeit* persists in a representative sample of Heidegger’s later writings, specifically the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, the ‘Brief über den Humanismus,’ and finally, *Was ist das: die Philosophie?*

In the introduction to *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger claims that what he considers to be the ‘prejudices’ (*die Vorurteile*) which give rise to the opinion that an inquiry into the meaning of *Sein* is unnecessary themselves “have their roots in ancient ontology itself” (SZ, 2, my translation). In fact, in order to understand ancient ontology adequately, “that ontology can only be interpreted under the guidance of the question of Being [*Frage nach dem Sein*], previously clarified and answered” (BT, 22, translation modified; SZ, 3). Thus,

⁸⁰ Strauss makes a similar claim, to be sure. The difference is that Strauss, following Socrates, believes opinions to be ‘fragments of the truth’ which philosophy seeks; hence, opinions are to be treated philosophically in order to *ascend* from those opinions to knowledge. Heidegger, on the other hand, consigns opinion to the realm of *das Man*, and believes they are only to be treated philosophically in the sense that they are inauthentic and to be *disregarded*. Again, each thinker’s respective treatment of conventional opinion points to their respective understanding and philosophical weighting of politics and the political.

⁸¹ See Heidegger’s equation of common sense, *Verständigkeit*, with the tendencies of *das Man* (e.g., BT, 305/ SZ, 260; BT, 334/ SZ 288; BT, 340/ SZ 293). Also, see BT, 454/ SZ, 403, where Heidegger approvingly quotes Count Yorck who says that “the *communis opinio* is nowhere near the truth, but is like an elemental precipitate of a halfway understanding which makes generalizations; in its relationship to truth it is like the sulphurous fumes which the lightning leaves behind.” Karl Löwith implies that one finds “common sense on trial” in Heidegger’s thinking (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 35).

in order to understand Greek philosophy⁸² properly, claims Heidegger, the question of *Sein* must be examined anew. It is important to note here that Heidegger views the prime importance of ancient thinkers to be their ontological investigations. Heidegger does not consider the political aspect of these thinkers, except from such an ontological perspective.⁸³

For Heidegger, the question of *Sein* is “the most basic and the most concrete question [*die prinzipiellste und konkreteste Frage*]” (BT, 29; SZ, 9) which can be asked. Questions of politics or political philosophy will always be asked in light of this question, and thus ontology precedes and grounds political philosophy. Heidegger implies that this is the case when he shows there to be an unexamined answer to the question of *Sein* at the bases of a variety of intellectual endeavours, such as mathematics, physics, biology, and theology, and, one also presumes, political philosophy of the time. Heidegger calls these endeavours the ‘positive sciences,’ and claims that an investigation into the meaning of *Sein* must ‘run ahead’ (*vorauslaufen*) of them in order to ground their ‘basic concepts’ (*Grundverfassungen*). This is because “[b]asic concepts are determinations in which the area of knowledge underlying all thematic objects of a science attains an understanding that precedes and guides all positive investigation” (BT, 8 (Stambaugh); SZ, 10). The *Grundverfassung* of a particular science remains uprooted and inchoate unless it is

⁸² Heidegger, when speaking of ‘ancient ontology,’ has in mind here the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, as is indicated when he discusses how the question of Being “gave sustenance” (*in Atem gehalten*) (SZ, 2, my translation) to their philosophical investigations, but from then on ceased to be an area of investigation. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine how Heidegger reads Plato anachronistically *through* Aristotle, thus indicating a possible reason why Heidegger’s and Strauss’s respective conceptions of the true import of Plato differ so greatly.

⁸³ Heidegger’s non- or anti-Socratic approach is evident here, in the sense that Socrates believed that engagement with those individuals in the $\zeta\gamma\omicron\rho\tau\epsilon$, what Heidegger would call *das Man*, was the only source of philosophical truth. This is because, as I mentioned earlier, Heidegger adheres to or follows the pre-Socratic understanding of philosophy, and thereby does not understand human beings as enmeshed from the start in political life.

examined in light of the question of the meaning of *Sein*. Not only that; ontology itself, as an investigation into the *Sein des Seiendes* “remains in its ground blind and a turning-around of its ownmost purpose [*eine Verkehrung ihrer eigensten Absicht*]” (SZ, 11, my translation) if the question of the meaning of *Sein* does not have priority. For Heidegger, any investigation into *Seiendes*, including political philosophy, will possess beforehand an unexamined conception of the *Sein* of those *Seiendes*, and remains ungrounded if an investigation of that conception is not given priority.

Philosophical investigation, then, must begin with ontology, or at least must begin with examining an object that will allow for an adequate start to ontology. Heidegger next considers this object or matter, which indicates the *ontic* priority of the question of *Sein*. Dasein is, for Heidegger, “ontically distinguished by the fact that in its Being this being [*Seiende*] is concerned about its very Being” (BT, 10, Stambaugh translation; SZ, 12). As “[u]nderstanding of Being is itself a determination of Being of Dasein [*Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins*]” (BT 10, Stambaugh translation; SZ, 12), Dasein becomes the only *Seiende* to investigate in order to accomplish the task of circumscribing the question of the meaning of *Sein*, the goal of ontology. Heidegger states that “[o]ntologies which have beings [*Seienden*] not like Dasein as their theme are accordingly founded and motivated in the ontic structure of Dasein itself” (BT, 11, Stambaugh’s translation, modified; SZ, 13). All ontological investigations which investigate merely *Seiendes*, or the *Sein des Seiendes*, themselves possess a nascent understanding of *Sein* in relation to Dasein, one which remains uninvestigated. Heidegger therefore begins *Sein und Zeit* with such an investigation in order to probe to the more fundamental question of the meaning of *Sein*

apart from Dasein's ontological structure.⁸⁴ The overall structure of *Sein und Zeit* indicates Heidegger's conception of 'first philosophy:' ontology, the subcategory of philosophy concerned with the most profound question of philosophy, must begin with an analysis of the ontologico-ontic structure of Dasein, the formal structure of 'being-there' which all human beings instantiate.⁸⁵

At this point, Heidegger can be seen as reformulating the Delphic commandment, γνῶθι σεαυτὸν or 'know thyself,' for if human beings are or instantiate Dasein through their existence, then an analysis of Dasein will constitute a certain form of self-knowledge. We can also say that the attempt to answer this question is one of the primary goals, if not *the* goal, of Socratic philosophy, and hence Heidegger's and Strauss's respective projects begin to appear similar. Both Heidegger and Strauss have, as an essential aspect of their respective philosophical projects, a particular conception of the essence of the human. Both conceptions are rooted in phenomenology, and hence stand apart from and against the modern conception of human beings as objects of science. More importantly, both conceptions have, at least formally, a conception of the *ends* of human life. In fact, however, we have come to a second profound difference between Strauss and Heidegger. As was mentioned above, the question of the best possible human life is not capable to be answered under Heidegger's rubric, because if philosophy is ontology, it is concerned with

⁸⁴ "Heidegger's main concern is with Being, not human being; he turns to human being as the way into the problem of Being" (Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* 53). Heidegger's analytic of Dasein remains as only the first half of the ultimately unfinished, or unfinishable, project of *Sein und Zeit*.

⁸⁵ Heidegger notes that "the question of 'First Philosophy,' namely, 'What is the being as such?' must drive us back beyond the question "What is Being as such?" to the still more original question, *From whence in general are we to comprehend the like of Being, with the wealth of articulations and references which are included in it?*" (KPM, 157, Heidegger's emphasis). Heidegger thus implies that his philosophical investigation is more radical than that of Aristotle, the source of the concept of 'first philosophy' as metaphysics, or a search for the principles or causes of beings (cf. *Metaphysics*, II, 993b25 ff.). Heidegger's plan, in his own words, is "*die Probleme der antiken Philosophie zu wiederholen, um sie in der Wiederholung durch sich selbst zu radikalieren*" (GA 24, 449, quoted in Rémi Brague, "Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought," 63). Brague's essay is an excellent examination of the consequences of Heidegger's radicality, and presents a view of Heidegger differing in kind, but not in gravity, from that of Strauss.

the meaning of *Sein* for the being which a human being instantiates, not the particular, or ontic, decisions and paths that an individual human being follows. Also, we can begin to see the outlines of Heidegger's understanding of the relation between theory and praxis. For Heidegger, theoretical knowledge, understood here as knowledge of the ontological structure of Dasein, is first and foremost knowledge of the Dasein's lived practices, because an ontology of Dasein describes the way in which Dasein *exists*. And, it is important to note, as praxis is forever mutable and subject to change in accordance with the vicissitudes of history, for Heidegger it is not possible to acquire knowledge of the best possible praxis for Dasein, i.e., the best possible human life at all times and in all places.⁸⁶

Heidegger holds the question of the meaning of *Sein* to be the question of philosophy for the remainder of his career, even when one takes into account the evident shift in vocabulary and focus of much of his later writing. In *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (lecture given in 1935, published in 1953), Heidegger claims the question, "why are there first of all beings and not rather nothing? [*Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?*]" (GA 40, 3, my translation), to be "first in rank for us first because it is the most far reaching, second because it is the deepest, and finally because it is the most

⁸⁶ Heidegger speaks about the division between theoretical and practical knowledge in no uncertain terms: "[t]he characterization of thinking as *qewr...*, and the determination of knowing as 'theoretical' comportment occur already within the 'technical' interpretation of thinking" ("Letter on 'Humanism,'" PM 241/ GA 9, 314). Heidegger believes thinking to be a form of acting, and hence theory and practice are inseparable. Karl Löwith writes that for Heidegger, "[t]hinking itself is already action," and consequently, "one can better experience what ethics is from Sophocles or from three words of Heraclitus than from the lectures of Aristotle. Only one single distinction is essential, namely that between Being and all beings" (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 38). Holding a slightly different conception, Franco Volpi claims that "[i]t is not *theoria* which is considered to be the supreme attitude, as the highest and preferred activity for man. Rather, in the ontological context established by Heidegger, it is the attitude of *praxis*, linked to a whole series of other determinations implied by it, which becomes the central connotation, to the extent that it is conceived as the fundamental modality of being and as the ontological structure of Dasein" ("Dasein as *praxis*: the Heideggerian Assimilation and the Radicalization of the Practical Philosophy of Aristotle," in *Critical Heidegger*, 42). Levinas identifies the consequence precisely: "[t]he whole human being is ontology" (*Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriann T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 3).

fundamental [*ürsprunglichste*] of all questions” (IM, 2; GA 40, 4). This seeming rewording of the fundamental question of *Sein und Zeit* continues the trajectory started in that earlier work, adjusted here because Heidegger is speaking of the originary question of metaphysics, which for him is less originary than fundamental ontology as it is concerned with the *Sein des Seiendes*, not *Sein* itself. For metaphysics, the question of the ‘why?’ of beings is first in rank and immediate. If those beings are contrasted with nothing (*Nichts*), as the guiding question of the *Einführung* forces us to do, *Seiendes* appear in their *Sein*, in the sense that their not being nothing permits their *Sein* to become evident.⁸⁷ In asking the question of the *Einführung*, we implicitly repeat the question of the meaning of *Sein* for human beings. The question of the *Einführung* “breaks open [*er-springt*] the ground for all genuine questions, and is thus at the origin [*Ur-sprung*] of them all” (IM, 6; GA 40, 8); Heidegger here indicates how, as in *Sein und Zeit*, the question of the meaning of *Sein* lies before all other human inquiry, serving as the basis for each particular investigative process or method. ‘First philosophy’ remains ontology in the *Einführung*, for the same reason as is claimed in *Sein und Zeit*.

In the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Heidegger’s vocabulary shifts radically, as has been previously mentioned; however, his conception of what first philosophy is, and why, continues to be in the same vein as *Sein und Zeit*. Expressing exactly this, Heidegger states

⁸⁷ Identifying one of the most important contrasts between Strauss and Heidegger, Velkley writes that “Heidegger identified the fundamental presupposition of all rationalism as the axiom that ‘nothing comes into being out of nothing or through nothing,’” after which appears a reference to Strauss’s claim that “[t]he philosophic quest for the first things presupposes not merely that there are first things but that the first things are always and that things which are always or are imperishable are more truly beings than the things which are not always. These presuppositions follow from the *fundamental premise* that no being emerges without a cause or that it is impossible that ‘at first Chaos came to be,’ i.e., that the first things jumped into being out of nothing and through nothing” (NRH, 89, my emphasis). Velkley points to Strauss’s and Heidegger’s different positions concerning the possibility of eternity. As an important aside, if one considers the first few lines of Genesis in tandem with the above passage from NRH, the schism between philosophical and theological (and thus political) conceptions of the origin of the whole becomes evident. Heidegger conducts an extended investigation into *das Nichts* and its importance for the meaning of *Sein* in “What is Metaphysics?” (PM, 82-96; GA 9, 103-122).

that “[t]he question concerning the ‘meaning’ [of *Sein*], i.e., in accordance with the explanation in *Sein und Zeit*, the question concerning grounding the domain of projecting [der Gründung des Entwurfsbereichs]—in short, the question of the *truth of Being* [der Wahrheit des Seyn]—is and remains *my* question, and is my *one and only* [einzige] question, for this question concerns what is most sole and unique [Einzigsten]” (CP, 8, translation modified, Heidegger’s emphasis; GA 65, 10). Even with the change in emphasis, Heidegger evidently understands himself to ask the same question, to hold to the same path, nearly a decade after *Sein und Zeit*. Put succinctly, for Heidegger philosophy is and remains “inquiring into Being [das Fragen nach dem Sein]” (CP, 299; GA 65, 424).

It is important to note, however, that Heidegger also considers his work at this point to be a call for what he identifies as ‘the other thinking,’ *das andere Denken*. In the “Brief über den Humanismus” (1946), a text which can be seen as a recapitulation of much of the as-yet unpublished *Beiträge* for a philosophical audience wholly unfamiliar with the language of the earlier work,⁸⁸ Heidegger explains the distinction: “the thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy because it thinks more originally than metaphysics—a name identical to philosophy” (PM, 276; GA 9, 364). Heidegger includes in the category of ‘metaphysics’ all philosophy since Plato, and in fact identifies Plato as the thinker who made philosophy metaphysical. In *Was ist das: die Philosophie?* (1955), Heidegger claims that philosophy merely “seeks what the being [das Seiende] is, in so far as it is” (WP, 55). Philosophy, derived from Plato, is not concerned with *Sein* as it is in itself, but rather merely the *Sein des Seiendes*. Philosophy, in questioning about *Seiendes*, is “on the way to

⁸⁸ “What is said here was not first thought up when this letter was written, but is based on the course taken by a path that was begun in 1936, in the ‘moment’ [Augenblick] of an attempt to say the truth of Being in a simple manner. The letter continues to speak in the language of metaphysics, and does so knowingly. The other language [die andere Sprache] remains in the background” (PM, 239; GA 9, 313 n. 1).

the Being of beings [*unterwegs zum Sein des Seienden*]” (WP, 55), but, beginning with Plato, *Sein* is always understood as instantiated in *Seiendes*, and is never understood as it is in itself. Philosophy is thus fundamentally metaphysical, and remains bound to the method originating in Plato, unlike Heidegger’s *andere Denken* which can express the truth of *Sein* adequately.

Strauss absolutely disagrees with this, claiming that a careful reading of Plato indicates that his purported metaphysical claims were only hypothetical answers to questions. It was the questions themselves which Plato held to be permanent and universal. For Strauss, there is no ‘metaphysics’—as it is commonly understood, a theoretical conception of what beings are—in Plato and, if this is the case, Heidegger’s critique has no purchase there. We are faced with two alternate readings of the history of philosophy. Further, I believe that it is the way in which both Strauss and Heidegger respectively approach reading philosophical texts that determines their understandings of that history. I will next investigate Strauss’s and Heidegger’s respective methods of reading in order to see either 1) how it is possible for an interpreter so gifted as Heidegger possibly to have missed something in the dialogues, or 2) how it is possible for an interpreter so gifted as Strauss to have misinterpreted Plato because Strauss did not think things ‘originarily’ enough.

3.3.3 Strauss's and Heidegger's Respective Hermeneutic Methods

[O]ne writes as one reads.

—Strauss, “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing”

It is crucial at the outset of this section to state Strauss's dependence for his subsequent work on Heidegger's earlier interpretations of Plato and Aristotle. This dependence cannot be overestimated;⁸⁹ however, as the work of many interpreters of Strauss has shown, not overestimating can lead to collapsing the two thinkers together.⁹⁰ I hope to show in what follows that even with Strauss's dependence on Heidegger, there

⁸⁹ Speaking of himself and Jacob Klein, “[n]othing affected us as profoundly in the years in which our minds took their lasting directions as the thought of Heidegger” (Strauss, “An Unspoken Prologue,” in JPCM, 450). This is a vague statement, however, as being ‘affected’ by a thinker in no way implies believing that thinker to be correct in his or her conclusions.

⁹⁰ For example, Luc Ferry, calling Strauss one of the “contemporary faces of the return to the Ancients,” indicates that Strauss's thought “finds sustenance for its *political* critique of modernity in deconstruction, without a doubt the most radical and most vigorous of the *philosophical* presuppositions of that modernity: Heideggerian phenomenology” (*Philosophie politique*, 18, author's emphasis, my translation). One of the main thrusts of Ferry's critique is an analysis of Strauss's purported attempt to overcome political modernity, which for Ferry leads Strauss into as much a historicist position concerning politics as Heidegger. For Ferry, both Strauss and Heidegger subscribe to the anti-modern position of “thought which makes the realization of the best regime depend on chance” (*Philosophie politique*, 93-94, my translation). Robert Pippin indicates his at least partial similarity to Ferry's position: “Strauss believed that the central modern question about the realization of a regime based on such principles will now require not an appeal to men's interests and passions but an ultimately mysterious ‘historical process’ or fate, independent of human will, something which leads necessarily to Heideggerian fatalism or some form of relativism” (“The Modern World of Leo Strauss,” in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 157). Here, both Ferry and Pippin read Strauss as abandoning modern thought in exactly the same way as Heidegger, which then leads to the anti-modern position of philosophy's inability to ground political action. In perhaps an even more critical vein, William H.F. Altman calls Strauss one of Heidegger's “followers,” in that he “preaches the secret teaching” of nihilism (“Leo Strauss on German Nihilism: Learning the Art of Writing,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2007), 593, 607). Altman unites Strauss and Heidegger against modernity and its form of liberalism, thus claiming Strauss to be politically dangerous. Similarly, Geoff Waite unites Strauss, Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt in a “battle action group” dedicated to a conception of politics concerned above all with reinstantiation of “order of rank” (“Heidegger, Schmitt, Strauss: The Hidden Monologue, or, Conserving Esotericism to Justify the High Hand of Violence,” *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 69 (Spring 2008), 127, 114). For Waite, “Heideggerians and Straussians differ mainly about how to use exo/esoteric language prudently so as to ensure an identically elitist vision of the perceived necessity of Nietzschean order or rank (i.e., the socioeconomic division of mental from manual labour) to allow philosophy to exist” (“On Esotericism: Heidegger and/or Cassirer at Davos,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (October 1998), 611). Waite's evident understanding here of the conception of ‘order or rank’ in light of Marxist categories indicates his partisanship for a modern philosophical conception of politics, i.e., that philosophy can actively participate in, and must be harnessed for, political life. Regardless of the differences between the four interpreters discussed in this footnote, partisanship for modernity and its understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics is a quality that all of them possess. It is useful at this point to remember Strauss's warning that, for him at least, philosophy can only be ‘intrinsically edifying;’ see n. 4 above.

remains a fundamental difference, one which is also revealed by the two thinkers' respective conceptions of nature and first philosophy examined above: the fundamentally political character of human existence and what this means for philosophical activity. This difference is also revealed in each thinker's method of reading and interpreting the history of philosophy, to which I now turn.

Both Strauss and Heidegger hold that the history of philosophy possesses, at least from the perspective of the present, a 'hidden' side or aspect.⁹¹ Both thinkers thus claim a novel way in which to read philosophical texts and thus to interpret that history in opposition to the traditional understanding of it. For Strauss, the fundamentally political character of human existence forces us to examine the texts of the history of philosophy 'politically,' or, to read them in light of Strauss's previous re-examination of the relation between philosophy and politics. In the Preface to *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, the book which indicates most clearly Strauss's conception of what it means to read philosophically, he indicates that "the relation between philosophy and politics" is the principal subject of the book (PAW, 5). Strauss, however, "writes for the side of philosophy" (PAW, 5). Immediately, we must notice that Strauss understands the relation to be one of conflict. In another essay, Strauss describes the conflict succinctly:

"[p]hilosophy or science, the highest activity of man, is the attempt to replace opinion about 'all things' by knowledge of 'all things;' but opinion is the element of society; philosophy or science is therefore the attempt to dissolve the element in which society breathes, and thus it endangers society. (WIPP, 221-222)

⁹¹ Strauss's conception will be discussed forthwith; for Heidegger, "the 'doctrine' [or 'teaching,' *Lehre*] of a thinker is the unsaid in that which he says [*in seinem Sagen Ungesagte*], that to which humanity is exposed, and on which it thereby expends itself" (PM, 155, translation modified; GA 9, 203). It is critical to note here that Heidegger later names the 'hidden' teaching to be found in the history of philosophy the 'unthought,' rather than the 'unsaid' ("the more original the thinking, the richer will be the unthought [*Ungedachtes*] in it" (WT, 76; WD, 72)). The later Heidegger believes thinkers ultimately do not have control over what is not immediately revealed, i.e., the 'hidden' in their writings. This indicates a crucial difference between him and Strauss.

Philosophy, in calling into question the prevailing truths through an attempt to attain the eternal truth of the whole, thereby puts the prevailing truths concerning the whole, the conventional truths of the contemporaneous political situation, absolutely into question.⁹²

Philosophy is thus always in danger of persecution. It does not matter what sort of regime currently exists, for all regimes are based upon opinions, those temporal truths from which philosophy, as Strauss understands it, distinguishes its discoveries.⁹³

Strauss thus makes the distinction between the exoteric and esoteric meaning of a philosophical text, that is, the public meaning intended for the unphilosophical, or political,

⁹² As a result, Strauss's position entails that philosophy, as the quest for wisdom concerning the whole, cannot interfere directly with political life. According to Gourevitch, Strauss believed that "sound practice requires freedom from interference by theory" ("Philosophy and Politics II," 314). Truly 'political' philosophy must abide by this notion. This claim indicates Strauss's anti-modern tendencies in opposition to the modern understanding of philosophy as "a weapon, and hence an instrument" (NRH, 34) for the purposes of political goals. As well, the claim points toward Strauss's understanding of nature, and investigation into nature as bifurcated, as was discussed above.

⁹³ It is crucial to note here that Strauss, unlike Heidegger, believes that the source of truth for Socratic philosophy is the conventional truths found in political life. As Nathan Tarcov states, "[p]hilosophy never starts from scratch but from our opinions" ("Philosophy and History," 28). In opposition to Heidegger's thought as the deepest contributor to the problem of the 'second cave,' "[p]hilosophy today must clarify opinions that can be clarified only historically. Classical political philosophy could dispense with such history because it confronted the 'natural' understanding of political things...[a]ccordingly, Strauss's historical investigations of the classical political philosophers have the character not so much of expounding their systems or doctrines as of articulating their confrontation with that prephilosophic understanding" ("Philosophy and History," 28). See also Catherine H. and Michael Zuckert's similar claim in *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 148-149, discussed in n. 66 above. Tarcov's conception of the 'confrontation' between philosophy and the prephilosophical, i.e., political/conventional, understanding of the whole points to the problematic status of metaphysics in Strauss's thought. Michael S. Kochin writes that "Strauss himself believes...that the familiar, metaphysical accounts of the whole, which are the philosopher's responses to [the] fundamental problems, are themselves historically conditioned: they are the product of a philosopher responding to the peculiar situation of his time, a situation that reflects both the permanent and the changing aspects of the human condition" ("Morality, Nature, and Esotericism in Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 278). Strauss arguably looks more Heideggerian on this account. 'Historically conditioned' is to be distinguished from the radical historicist claim of 'historically determined,' however: "the historicist premise that each political philosophy is essentially related to its historical situation tends to blind one to the possibility of exoteric writing" (Tarcov, "Philosophy and History," 20). Hence, as this section will show, the principle of esoteric writing can be seen as what ultimately distinguishes Strauss's position from that of Heidegger's, including, above all, the understanding of the relation between philosophy and political life and the moral aspect of philosophical investigation concomitant with that principle.

many and the private meaning intended for the philosophical few, respectively.⁹⁴ An esoteric text “contains two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character,⁹⁵ which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines” (PAW, 36). This is not to say that ‘political’ philosophy, in Strauss’s sense, began with the goal of developing sects or hidden orders.⁹⁶

The community of philosophers is not a secret society. Rather,

⁹⁴ David Janssens explains: “[a]ccording to [classical Greek philosophers], not every human being is capable of leading a life of questioning and contemplation: there is an ineradicable qualitative difference between the small group of philosophers and the multitude of nonphilosophers. What is intelligible to the former creates confusion and distrust among the latter” (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 124). This belief is concomitant with the conception of a ‘natural hierarchy of human ends,’ with philosophy at the top only because it is the only human life that attempts to discover the best human end as such. The deeply ironic and tentative nature of this claim is often obscured by the loudness of attempts to shout down Strauss’s position. The claim to ‘natural elitism,’ i.e., to positing or rediscovering the existence of a teaching “which is embedded in the text but which only some people are capable of drawing out” (Nicholas Xenos, “Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of the War on Terror,” *Logos* vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 6), has become the source of much of the vitriol, from atheists and believers, from the Right and the Left, directed against Strauss over the past 30 years or so, leading to the accusations as varied as ‘intellectual godfather of neoconservatism,’ ‘crypto-Nietzschean,’ and, most recently and perhaps most gravely considering Strauss’s background and apparent political beliefs, a “crypto-Nazi” (Altman, “The Alpine Limits of Jewish Thought: Leo Strauss, National Socialism and *Judentum Ohne Gott*,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2009), 38). Perhaps a more level-headed criticism can be found in Dallmayr, *Polis and Praxis: Exercises in Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984): “there cannot be, I believe, an esoteric philosophy as long as the latter is seen as open-ended discourse and inquiry. Cultivated behind closed doors, philosophical ‘truths’ inevitably degenerate into dogmas or passwords among the initiated, and ‘knowledge’ into the emblem of an intellectual coterie” (37). I do not wish to participate in this divisive and heated discussion here, however. I allow myself one brief comment: it is interesting that, aside from Dallmayr’s moderation, the accusations from all sides are similar only in regards to their force, not their content. The only similarity content-wise is the idea to be ‘anti-Strauss.’ Perhaps this indicates both the inherent tension between philosophy’s calling into question *all* conventional opinion concerning the good and political life’s dependence on that convention, and the fact that in modernity, philosophy is not so much a way of life as what Strauss calls a ‘weapon’ to be used for political ends. Suggestions to the contrary go against both modernity and political life, and it is no wonder that the rage inspired by Strauss persists to this day.

⁹⁵ It is important to note the placement of quotation marks in Strauss’s remark that “the essential purpose of any exoteric teaching is ‘government’ of the lower by the higher, and hence in particular the guidance of political communities” (PAW, 121). The edifying character of exoteric writing is not secret control of the political situation in which a philosopher finds him- or herself; rather, as will be shown, ‘government,’ in this context, means simply encouragement of political moderation, on the one hand, and making the political situation safe for philosophy, on the other, and nothing more. There is no political program in Strauss’s writings, except that for the purposes of philosophy’s continued existence.

⁹⁶ At the risk of belabouring the point, many commentators in recent years have overemphasized the esoteric side of Strauss’s understanding of ‘writing between the lines’ in order to levy political critiques against Strauss. One of the first, upon which much of the criticism which came after has been based, was that by Shadia Drury who emphasizes the ‘secret kingship’ of philosophers: “philosophy will have the ear of the powerful, and philosophers can rule the city behind the scenes with no risks to themselves or to philosophy” (“The Esoteric Philosophy of Leo Strauss,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (August 1985), 319). But cf.

[t]he exoteric teaching was need for protecting philosophy. It was the armour in which philosophy had to appear. It was needed for political reasons. It was the form in which philosophy became visible to the political community. It was the political aspect of philosophy. It was ‘political’ philosophy. (PAW, 17-18).

In addition to protecting philosophy, esoteric writing performs a second political function, for “philosophers or scientists must respect the opinions on which society rests” (WIPP, 222). This is indicated in the quotation above: one of the teachings of an esoteric text is politically ‘edifying,’ thereby respecting and even promoting good political action. However, as Strauss notes, “[t]o respect opinions is something entirely different from accepting them as true” (WIPP, 222). The philosopher will act in a politically moderate manner, making him- or herself immune from persecution and simultaneously presenting a politically edifying teaching, while at the same time privately acknowledging the permanent questionability of the reigning political opinions. This simultaneity of two wholly different teachings, both of which appearing as the ‘surface’ of the text, i.e., the text

Strauss’s notion of ‘secret kingship’ in context in PAW, 17, where the summation of ‘secret kingship’ merely means the attempt to “humanize” one’s “imperfect political situation.” This, it must be noted, is what Strauss believes to be the ancient understanding of the relation between philosophy and political life; the modern one attaches philosophy to political life much more deeply, whereby philosophy becomes a ‘weapon’ for political purposes. This presupposition, held to by arguably all of Strauss’s most vehement critics, may be the ultimate reason for those critics’ attacks. We see this presupposition in action when Waite quotes Strauss’s writings on Machiavelli, namely that Machiavelli is a “captain without an army” who can recruit his army “only by means of books” (TM, 154), and then proceeds to ascribe this position *to Strauss himself* (“Heidegger, Schmitt, Strauss,” 123). In aligning Strauss with Machiavelli, Waite disregards Strauss’s constant exhortations to political moderation and attempts to distance philosophy from political edification. Further, it is unclear if it would ever be possible for the philosophers to agree to the point where such a ‘secret kingship’ could get underway; as Arthur M. Melzer notes, “[d]ifferent thinkers engaged in this practice [of esoteric writing—DT] for different reasons, using different techniques, and on behalf of different beliefs. There is religious esotericism, for example, and secular esotericism” (“Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism,” 280). Even further, Batnitzky notes that “the texts [Strauss] ascribes as esoteric are public documents: they are available to all readers...[and] the esoteric meaning of a text for Strauss is decipherable to a, and in fact *any*, careful reader...[therefore,] the availability of esoteric knowledge is not limited to secret clubs of the elite” (*Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 164, author’s emphasis). This is concomitant with Strauss’s claim that the truth can be discovered at any time and place. However, as Gourevitch writes, “[c]entral to Strauss’s entire position is the conviction that philosophical inquiry does not vouchsafe access, let alone privileged access, to realms above and beyond men’s ordinary concern and apprehension” (“Philosophy and Politics II, 294). Strauss’s idea of esoteric writing expresses something of the inherent *weakness*, as well as the danger, of his conception of philosophy. For Strauss, and contra modernity, knowledge is *not* power, but rather the attempt to acquire knowledge draws emphasis to the lack of ground for power’s claims to authority.

itself unencumbered with modern ‘methodologies’ of reading, sheds some light on Strauss’s enigmatic hermeneutic ‘principle,’ that “[t]he problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things” (TM, 13).⁹⁷

The basis for what could be called with hesitation Strauss’s ‘politically edifying’ teaching, then, is that he believes there to be a permanent tension between the conventional opinions of political life and the unceasing questioning of philosophical life, and that this situation necessitates a politically moderate stance. The philosopher cannot rule, as the regime necessary for the existence of conventional political life cannot survive if it permanently questions its own basis or essence, as a philosopher-ruled regime would be. Such questioning, conversely, is the fundamental character of the philosophical life. Therefore, the fundamental political action for philosophers is “the gradual replacement of the accepted opinions by the truth or an approximation of the truth,” while at the same time recognizing that “the replacement of the accepted opinions could not be gradual, if it were not accompanied by a provisional acceptance of the accepted opinions” (PAW, 17).⁹⁸ As we have seen, philosophers cannot claim to have discovered the truth without becoming dogmatists, who are anathema to genuine philosophical discourse. The revelation of this fact—the permanently zetetic character of philosophy and its recognition of the fundamental instability of conventional political opinion—would lead to persecution of

⁹⁷ For Tanguay, esotericism is best conceived as a “veiling,” in the sense that “[o]ne can perceive [in Strauss’s texts] the contours of that which is veiled, yet without always being in a position to describe the contents with precision” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 3). It is also critical to note that “[t]he extreme artfulness of this way of writing consists precisely in making the reader believe that what is most important is always hidden, even though what is essential is very often found on the surface of the text, expressed in a clear and evident manner” (*Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, 3-4). Sometimes the esotericist writes esoterically, sometimes not. This claim, adding difficulty upon interpretive difficulty and providing additional argument against claims to the existence of a ‘Straussian cult,’ runs counter to the hermeneutic strategy practiced by critics who ascribe esotericism as fundamental to explaining Strauss’s own philosophical position, e.g., Drury, Waite, Xenos, and most recently, Altman.

⁹⁸ “The point of the ‘noble lie’ is to persuade the citizens that their civic arrangements are more completely natural and just than they really are” (Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 129).

philosophy. Hence, esoteric writing becomes the means by which to actualize the prudent ends of both protecting philosophical activity and moderating the political situation in which philosophers dwell. Strauss thus introduces a moral impetus for esoteric writing. This is not to say that philosophy shares in the morality of the city, however.⁹⁹ The philosopher is conventionally moral insofar as he or she respects the opinions upon which political life rests, but such respect seems to be, and in light of the character of permanent zetetic questioning seems only to be, a public or exoteric respect.¹⁰⁰ The philosopher, for both Heidegger and Strauss, is *unheimlich*, but must live as if he or she finds a home in the

⁹⁹ Ronald Beiner notes that “[i]n agreement with Nietzsche, and in opposition to Kant, Strauss holds that there is not one morality but different moralities, each binding for a different class of souls, governed by the ‘pathos of distance’” (“Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue,” 248). This point elaborates Strauss’s idea of ‘natural elitism.’ being discussed in this section. This also evinces the fact that “by raising the crucial question, ‘What is virtue?’ philosophy is led “to a critical distinction between the generally praised attitudes which are rightly praised, and those which are not; and it leads to the recognition of a certain hierarchy, unknown in prephilosophic life, of the different virtues” (WIPP, 94). However, it is also important to see that “recognition of the essential difference between the political and the nonpolitical, or, more fundamentally, recognition of the existence of essential differences, or of noetic heterogeneity, appears as moderation—as opposed to the madness of the philosophers preceding Socrates” (RCPR, 132). We see here the tension between two competing virtues, philosophical and political, and hence what could be called two competing ‘moralities,’ rooted in Strauss’s understanding of nature and related the problem of homogeneity and heterogeneity discussed earlier in this chapter. As Gourevitch identifies, “[j]ustice is *the* political virtue, in contrast to wisdom which is essentially a-political” (“Philosophy and Politics I,” 74). We can see this idea in Strauss’s statement that “moderation is not a virtue of thought: Plato likens philosophy to madness, the very opposite of sobriety or moderation; thought must be not moderate, but fearless, not to say shameless” (WIPP, 32). In passing, it is almost humorous to note the great irony that it was Strauss’s identification of esoteric writing which “has been the means by which great opprobrium, if not exactly persecution, has been called down upon him” (Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 120).

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note again that much of the criticism directed at Strauss finds its source in the idea that philosophers want political control. Such criticism misses Strauss’s point that philosophers merely wish “to create a world fit for the habitation of philosophers and nonphilosophers alike” (Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 125). This passage still indicates what is problematic for those opposed to Strauss, the inherent natural inequalities present between human beings. Zuckert and Zuckert accurately describe Strauss as holding the opinion that “the Enlightenment was a foolish, even dangerous enterprise” (*The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 133) due to its claim that all human beings have equal capacity to understand, or more accurately, to *live in the light of*, philosophical truth, i.e., that any claims to have discovered ‘the’ truth are permanently subject to questioning. For Strauss, says Drury, “[e]galitarianism and an indiscriminate faith in the value of truth” characterizes the post-Enlightenment epoch, which distinguishes that epoch from “the wisdom of antiquity” (“The Esoteric Philosophy of Leo Strauss,” 322). Drury is also partially correct when she observes that philosophers act politically “[f]or the love of the world” (“The Esoteric Philosophy of Leo Strauss,” 320), a justification for political action similar to Rosen’s above, and similar to Tarcov’s claim that exoteric writing “is...required by philanthropy or taking one’s ‘social duties’ seriously” (“Philosophy and History,” 18).

contemporaneous political situation.¹⁰¹ The two prudent ends, which really amount to the same, overarching end—the continuation of the possibility of philosophy in the Socratic sense—circumscribe the precise moral sense of ‘political’ in Strauss’s conception of political philosophy. It is important at this point, however, to acknowledge that philosophy is not political for purely instrumental reasons. As was discussed above, philosophy in the Socratic sense depends on political life for sustenance, both materially *and* philosophically. Philosophy begins by examining the opinion concerning the whole and the beings within it, and philosophy treats those opinions as the source of any truth which it may discover.¹⁰² Therefore, philosophy must respect political life in a second, deeper sense.¹⁰³

Al-Farabi, for Strauss an archetypal esoteric writer, “avails himself of the specific immunity of the commentator or of the historian in order to speak his mind concerning grave matters” (PAW, 14), i.e., presenting his philosophical ideas in the guise of mere commentaries on other philosophers in order to disguise the radical nature of those ideas. For Strauss, the example of Al-Farabi, subject to persecution in a strictly religious political situation, shows that “[p]ersecution gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all things is presented

¹⁰¹ As was remarked at the beginning of this section, this similarity has led to collapsing Heidegger and Strauss together, and has led critics to make claims such as both Heidegger and Strauss forming or taking part in a “battle action group” characterized by members being “conserver[s] of esotericism” (Waite, “Heidegger, Schmitt, Strauss,” 127). This characterization ignores the fact that Strauss *published*, or revealed, the existence of esoteric writing. A more sympathetic understanding of this relation is that “the philosopher is in a permanent state of exile because he of necessity lives in two places at once and for this reason is never entirely at home. While the philosopher lives in society, his ultimate dwelling lies in the homelessness of his philosophic quest” (Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 170). At this point in her argument, Batnitzky elaborates upon Eugene Sheppard’s fascinating *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*, a book which is perhaps overly critical due to its emphasis on “situating Strauss’s thought within the context of his biography” (7). Sheppard’s interpretive principle, while important to consider, goes too far in asserting the dependence of philosophical thought on historical context; such a position seemingly claims to understand Strauss better than he understood himself.

¹⁰² For Duff, Strauss is committed to “the important association of wisdom with moderation” because philosophers wish “to preserve what limited access they have to the truth” (“Stanley Rosen’s Critique of Leo Strauss,” 624).

¹⁰³ “[T]he wise philosopher [*sic*] for Strauss is dependent on society not only for purely instrumental reasons but philosophically and morally as well” (Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 167).

exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only” (PAW, 25).¹⁰⁴ Making reference to the *Republic*, Strauss indicates the target audience of esoteric writing in another way: “[i]t is as true today as it was two thousand years ago that it is a safe venture to tell the truth one knows to benevolent and trustworthy acquaintances, or more precisely, to reasonable friends” (PAW, 23), or, more precisely still, the community of philosophers.¹⁰⁵ Here we see a second view of the morality inherent in the practice of esoteric writing: those who did so in the past presupposed that their intended audience would not widely disseminate the esoteric teachings found in their texts; philosophical activity was to remain fundamentally private.¹⁰⁶ According to Strauss, this situation changes in modernity. Basing the change on the principles of full Enlightenment, modern philosophers “concealed their views only far enough to protect themselves as well as possible from persecution; had they been more

¹⁰⁴ It is useful to compare this statement with the subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘a book for everyone and no-one.’ Did Nietzsche, who was certainly aware of the existence of esoteric writing (see, e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 30, or *The Gay Science*, 38), not learn the political lesson which Strauss believes to be concomitant with that form of writing? As Strauss notes, in contrast to Nietzsche, “Socrates calls on *some*” (“The Problem of Socrates,” 324, Strauss’s emphasis). This issue will be briefly discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Strauss has indicated the criteria for entering this community: intelligence, trustworthiness, benevolence, reasonableness. Again perhaps belabouring the point, political aspirations, ascribed by many commentators discussed in this section to Strauss and his ‘disciples’ are seemingly left at the door, so to speak.

¹⁰⁶ We can see here both a similarity and a schism between Strauss’s conception of hermeneutics and that of Gadamer. Both Strauss and Gadamer believe hermeneutic activity to be related to morality, or more specifically, the virtues of the interpreter. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is ultimately not a method: “...what the tool of *method* does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a *discipline* of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth” (*Truth and Method*, 491, my emphasis, referenced in Robert J. Dostal, “Gadamerian Hermeneutics and Irony: Between Strauss and Derrida,” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 38 (2008), 249). As Dostal identifies, “[v]irtues are appropriate of a discipline; principles, of a method” (“Gadamerian Hermeneutics and Irony,” 249). This connects with the tenuous claim that Strauss does not possess a hermeneutic method, to be discussed below. For now, however, it is important to note that a critical division between Gadamer and Strauss is that for Gadamer, the “hermeneutic virtues exercised together in our common world make solidarity possible” (Dostal, “Gadamerian Hermeneutics and Irony,” 251), which means that Gadamer believes that all may be potential hermeneuticists (and therefore philosophers), and hence Gadamer is a modern. Conversely, for Strauss, not everyone can attain the level of ‘intelligence and trustworthiness’ necessary to participate in the philosophical conversation, and hence Strauss follows the ancient notion that not all can be philosophers.

subtle than that, they would have defeated their purpose, which was to enlighten an ever-increasing number of people who were not potential philosophers” (PAW, 34).¹⁰⁷

We are thus led to a consideration of the possibility of persecution in a liberal democracy. Strauss notes that post-Renaissance thinkers published works intended to eliminate persecution once and for all, to bring about “a time when, as a result of the progress of popular education, practically complete freedom of speech would be possible, or—to exaggerate for the purposes of clarification—to a time when no one would suffer any harm from hearing any truth” (PAW, 33-34). What role would an esoteric text have in a time of complete freedom from persecution? In such a “truly liberal society” (PAW, 36), esoteric texts would be used for education in the technique and substance of Socratic philosophy.¹⁰⁸ Recognizing the impermanence of political stability, or, more accurately, the permanence of political instability, Strauss recommends such education as the basis for answering the “always pressing question, . . . the political question par excellence, of how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license” (PAW, 37).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Indicating again the moral quality of esoteric writing, Kochin writes that the claim that “there is no sin but ignorance” almost works as a satisfactory definition of what Strauss considers to be a philosopher, and that “the difference between the ancients and moderns lies in the question of their willingness to profess it” (“Morality, Nature, and Esotericism,” 272). The evident implication is that ancient and modern philosophy each possess a particular understanding of the human: for the ancients, only some may be philosophers, but for the moderns, all may be philosophers. It is important to remember Heidegger’s conception of authenticity here: all Dasein may choose authentically through recognition of the inherent finitude of Dasein’s existence. Heidegger’s modern character seems evident here.

¹⁰⁸ “Esotericism is an educational tool” (Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 169); “[e]soteric writing is above all a pedagogical tool. . . [for] [a]s any teacher (or poker player) knows, one does not show one’s hand all at once” (Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss*, 165). Other commentators recognize the essentially Socratic character of esoteric writing: it is “a written imitation, as far as that is possible, of the oral Socratic method” (Kochin, “Morality, Nature, and Esotericism,” 262); Melzer states exactly the same point (“Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism,” 280). Batnitzky elaborates on the inherently dialogical character of Strauss’s hermeneutics: “first. . . in the emphasis on multiple speakers in the great texts of the past, and second, in the emphasis on the present’s conversation with the past” (*Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 172).

¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that, given Strauss’s division between the problems of politics and those of philosophy, his claim must be understood as a call for political moderation, i.e., the political virtue of necessarily immoderate philosophy. Rosen correctly understands Strauss’s works to be “the expression of a political program” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 118); however, Rosen underemphasizes the nature of Strauss’s

Even in a political situation allowing for perfect freedom of thought, the recognition of esoteric writing allows for the accurate study of texts which indeed were written in that way, i.e., ones that possess an edifying teaching while at the same time permitting philosophy to flourish.¹¹⁰

We may ask the question of Strauss's reason for revealing esoteric writing publicly in the form of discussing it in widely-disseminated books, while esoteric writing would seem to be able to take care of itself. If the existence of esoteric writing is revealed in widely-disseminated books and articles, as Strauss did, it may no longer be esoteric. However, I believe Strauss to have revealed the existence of esoteric writing in a time relatively free from persecution of philosophy for one specific reason: as an antidote or antipode to the radically modern position of radical historicism.¹¹¹ Esoteric writing solves the problem of the division of theoretical and practical knowledge, thereby escaping Heidegger's criticism of philosophical positions which hold to that division. Rather than rekindling the problematic relation between theory and practice, Strauss shows how it is possible to conduct theoretical examinations of the whole while simultaneously permitting practical understandings of that whole to take priority for political life, thereby also limiting

politics as always in the service of and directed toward philosophy. Rosen thus comes close to those commentators who claim a specific political program to be found in Strauss, namely that of neoconservatism (Drury, Waite, Xenos, Altman, etc.). Crucial to remember here is that esoteric writing "is first and foremost a method [*sic*] for historically understanding writers in the past who incontestably lived in nonliberal societies, and not a prescription for writers living today (Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 121).

¹¹⁰ "Esoteric writing had to be rediscovered because the need for it had been forgotten in contemporary liberal societies, where absolute freedom of expression is supposedly guaranteed and where dissimulation is regarded as altogether vicious" (Miller, "Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy," 83).

¹¹¹ In a footnote, Strauss approvingly quotes Archibald MacLeish, who writes in 1940 that "[p]erhaps the luxury of the complete confession, the uttermost despair, the farthest doubt should be denied themselves by writers living in any but the most orderly and settled times. I do not know" (PAW, 34 n. 14). In this quote, we can see traces of Strauss's understanding of Heidegger's 'despairing, doubting confession' of the absolute impossibility of extraction from one's temporal-political situation, and thereby the philosophical 'denial of eternity,' as well as Strauss's implicit critique of such a position's inherent political immoderation.

the theoretical and the practical to their proper respective roles and domains.¹¹² For Strauss, it was necessary to make the politically fraught decision to publish the existence of esoteric writing for the sake of the continued existence of philosophy, for “historicism is incompatible with philosophy in the original meaning of the word, and historicism cannot be ignored today” (WIPP, 227).¹¹³ As well, as was noted repeatedly in Chapter 1, radical historicism has problematic political consequences as well, which Strauss wishes to combat. Radical historicism, which holds that “even the greatest minds cannot liberate themselves from the specific opinions which rule their particular society” (WIPP, 227), disallows the possibility of esoteric writing, for there cannot be a separate philosophical teaching in a text, as distinguished from the political teaching, if the philosopher cannot extract him- or herself from the political situation in which he or she is embedded.¹¹⁴ Thus, if Strauss proves the existence of esoteric writing, he thereby proves at least one aspect of radical historicism to be incorrect.¹¹⁵

Finally, it must be stated again that Strauss believed the contemporary philosophical situation to be likened to a ‘cave beneath the cave,’ i.e., that there are now artificial barriers to philosophy as the ancients understood it, barriers that need to be overcome so that philosophy in the Socratic sense can recommence. Strauss believed Heidegger to be the most powerful thinker of modernity, and hence the most powerful basis for our falling into

¹¹² Thus, Strauss avoids the thrust of Dallmayr’s critique in *Polis and Praxis*, namely that for Strauss, “practice appears simultaneously as synonymous with, and antithetical to, theoretical insight” (39). Given the discussion of esoteric writing just completed, Dallmayr’s appellation of Strauss’s illogicity goes too far: Strauss wishes to emphasize the aporetic status of the tension between philosophy and politics, i.e., that, counter to a central tenet of the Enlightenment, the tension will *never* be resolved.

¹¹³ Tarcov argues that historicism “tends to blind one to the possibility of exoteric writing” (“Philosophy and History,” 20).

¹¹⁴ Zuckert and Zuckert note that if this extraction is impossible, “Strauss is caught within a Heideggerian cage and must ultimately agree with Heidegger” (*The Truth about Leo Strauss*, 147).

¹¹⁵ “[T]he possibility that a political philosopher was merely adapting the expression of his thought and not his thought itself to his historical situation renders doubtful the evidence for historicism” (Tarcov, “Philosophy and History,” 20).

the ‘second cave.’¹¹⁶ Strauss’s educational move of revealing the existence of esoteric writing must be understood, then, as a contribution to the attempt to return to the ‘first cave’ in which philosophy proper can begin.¹¹⁷

Strauss hints at the particular method of reading an esoteric text, which I will subsequently contrast with the method of a ‘radical historicist.’ In all contexts,

[r]eading between the lines is strictly prohibited in all cases where it would be less exact than not doing so. Only such reading between the lines as starts from an exact consideration of the explicit statements of the author is legitimate. The context in which a statement occurs, and the literary character of the whole work as well as its plan, must be perfectly understood before an interpretation of the statement can reasonably claim to be adequate or even correct. One is not entitled to delete a passage, nor to emend its text, before one has fully considered all reasonable possibilities of understanding the passage as it stands—one of these possibilities being that the passage may be ironic. (PAW, 30)

We can see that for Strauss, the discovery of esoteric writing is not intended to be the starting point of a hermeneutic methodology; in fact, Strauss believes himself to have no defined hermeneutic methodology,¹¹⁸ in the sense of a particular method that *all* may apply

¹¹⁶ “Over the last two centuries, the forgetfulness of esotericism has led modern readers to identify the true thought of past writers with the merely exoteric and conventional surface of their writings. This crucial interpretive error has...produced the false appearance that all human thought is merely a reflection of prevailing conventions” (Melzer, “Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism,” 288-289). Tarcov is more specific, claiming that a philosophical position against historicism is in “the artificial situation confronting the denial of the possibility of an account of the whole by what appears to be philosophy” (“Philosophy and History,” 27). Possibly making an oblique reference to Heidegger’s conflation of philosophy and religion, Gourevitch remarks that Strauss “regards the widely prevailing belief that the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem has, for all practical purposes, been settled, to betoken an intellectual parochialism which threatens the very survival of philosophy among us” (“Philosophy and Politics II,” 295-296).

¹¹⁷ In a fascinating discussion concerning esoteric writing, Jürgen Gebhardt makes the insightful remark that “the dualism of esotericism and exotericism emerges from the true philosopher’s role in political society; that is, *it pertains exclusively to the world of the natural cave*” (*Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 101, my emphasis). This means that in the contemporary situation of the second cave, esoteric writing is “utterly pointless” (*Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, 101). This is due to the fact that in the ‘second cave,’ philosophy and convention/politics are not sufficiently demarcated, i.e., all philosophical ideas become conventional opinions, and there is no possibility to attain the truth about the whole. Philosophy thus becomes the handmaiden of convention, and hence a ‘weapon.’ Strauss’s revealing of esoteric writing can therefore be seen as the lynchpin of his philosophical project to point the way back to the natural first position of human existence, the Platonic cave of convention.

¹¹⁸ “Not only is my own hermeneutic experience very limited—the experience which I possess makes me doubtful of whether a universal hermeneutic theory which is more than ‘formal’ or external is possible. I

in order to grasp the ‘true,’ i.e., esoteric, teaching of a text.¹¹⁹ Rather, in the attempt to understand the author as he or she understood him- or herself, the interpreter must be concerned with the ‘explicit statements of the author’ ‘considered exactly.’¹²⁰ Only this exact consideration, and what it indicates concerning the author’s intent, allows one to interpret a text esoterically. The radical historicist, conversely, “is compelled, by his principle if against his intention, to try to understand the past better than it understood itself” (RCPR, 210). For Strauss, “if one does not take seriously the intention of the great thinkers [i.e., for Strauss the intention to acquire knowledge of the truth about the whole—DT], one cannot understand them; but historicism is based on the premise that this intention is unreasonable because it is simply impossible to know the truth about the whole” (WIPP,

believe the doubt arises from the feeling of the irretrievably ‘occasional’ character of every worthwhile interpretation” (“Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*,” 5). In attributing a ‘method’ to Gadamer, Strauss may be misinterpreting him somewhat, as Gadamer believes hermeneutics to be a discipline rather than a methodology (see n. 106 above). However, this passage does emphasize the importance of the gifts or virtues of the interpreter, ones which serve as the criteria by which to judge an interpretation as ‘worthwhile.’

¹¹⁹ Batnitzky claims that “Strauss’s hermeneutic approach is in an important sense without content” (*Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*, 165), due to its lack of a discernable method; here, she follows the interpretation of Paul A. Cantor: “for Strauss, interpretation must always remain an art and cannot be turned into a science. Interpretation cannot hope to proceed according to universal and unequivocal rules, which will always yield unambiguous and unassailable results. Rather, interpretation must rely for its success on certain qualities in the interpreter, such as prudence, tact, and judgement, which unfortunately cannot be expected of all interpreters. For Strauss, one can offer principles of interpretation but not rules, unless one means *rules* in the sense of *rules of thumb*” (“Leo Strauss and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” in *Leo Strauss’s Thought*, 270, author’s emphasis). This passage understates my point above, that for Strauss, the recognition of esoteric writing requires a certain morality, namely the morality of the philosopher, and thereby his position subtends on the deeper one of a fundamental divide between different human types. A methodology, by contrast, does not require one to be ‘virtuous’ in order to follow it; it is in principle accessible to all. This is not to say that Strauss does not give hermeneutic *guidelines* to follow. For example, “one should not devote all of one’s time to the traditional canon of political philosophers,” and “one cannot understand any book of the past solely by itself” (Tarcov, “Philosophy and History,” 12); as well, it is crucial to remember that Strauss recommends “judging ‘speeches’ in the light of the more trustworthy ‘deeds’ or ‘actions;’” Gourevitch, in what may be an overstatement, calls this “Strauss’s hermeneutic principle” (“Philosophy and Politics,” 310).

¹²⁰ Allan Bloom emphasizes that Strauss’s hermeneutic position appears ridiculous from the point of view of contemporary scholarship: “...some might think, and some have actually thought, that [Strauss] was an innocent who picked up the great books and read them as would an ordinary reader who was unaware that they are the preserve of an infinite number of scholars in a variety of disconnected disciplines who possess information without which one understands nothing of them” (*Giants and Dwarfs*, 248). However, the question of how to read a text is, for Bloom’s Strauss, paramount: “[t]he way to read books—so small a concern—is the point from which the problems of modern philosophy come into focus” (*Giants and Dwarfs*, 248).

227). Radical historicist writers, then, attempt to understand past philosophers better than they understood themselves, as historicism possesses the insight of the impossibility of extraction from one's political situation and its concomitant opinions. Methodologically speaking, for the radical historicist, an 'exact consideration' of the statements of a philosopher will not indicate whether the text is esoteric, but rather something else entirely. Whether or not he is accurately portrayed as Strauss's archetypal representative of radical historicism, Heidegger would agree with the above statement, although the notion of evaluation of interpretation seemingly implies that there is one perfect interpretation of a particular thinker that will stand for all time which is disallowed at the outset by Heidegger's methodological framework. Thinkers of the past were incorrect in assuming that they could completely or finally describe the whole, for if the whole, or *Sein*, is fundamentally temporal, then any description of it will be necessarily temporal and hence incomplete. Heidegger thus rereads the history of philosophy in light of this stipulation, and it is to an examination of his hermeneutic method, one in accordance with the above stipulation, that I will now turn.

Despite some shifts in terminology from the earliest works to *Sein und Zeit*,¹²¹ Heidegger continues to hold that the act of interpreting a philosophical text must always be carried out in, structurally speaking, the same way as Dasein's act of interpreting its world, and hence such textual interpretation must understand its temporal essence. Heidegger indicated this in his plan of a book, never written, on 'phenomenological interpretations of Aristotle' (1922): interpretation must recognize that "[t]he situation of interpretation, i.e., of the appropriation and understanding of the past, is always the living situation of the

¹²¹ In 1922, Heidegger speaks of 'factual life,' a concept taken up from Dilthey; at the time of *Sein und Zeit*, 'factual life' has been replaced with 'Dasein.' For a detailed discussion of this change, Theodore Kisiel's *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* is essential.

present” (SU, 112). This does not mean that, e.g., the past can inform our current situation because we face similar problems as past thinkers did. Rather, each past thinker adjusted his or her language to his or her historical situation. Giving the example of Plato, Heidegger states in a lecture from 1921 that his “concepts were specifically tailored to *factual life*,” and as a result, “the Greek way of speaking cannot be coordinated with ours” (PIA, 37).¹²² Due to interpretation’s fundamental basis in the temporally conditioned situation, “philosophical research is something a ‘time,’ as long as it is not merely concerned with it as a matter of education, can never borrow from another time” (SU, 113). Instead, the final result of interpretation will be a creative modification conducted in accordance with the demands of the present: “[u]nderstanding consists not merely in taking up the past for the sake of a knowledge that merely takes note of it but rather in repeating in an original manner what is understood in the past in terms of and for the sake of one’s very own situation” (SU, 114). The idea of repetition, which figures so prominently in the ontological structure of Dasein in *Sein und Zeit*, is developed first in the context of hermeneutic activity concerning philosophical writings. Much as authentic Dasein continuously repeats its own past possibilities in a novel way, the reader, if possessing the ability necessary to do so, interprets the text under scrutiny through repeating that which is most radical in it in a novel way.¹²³

¹²² Interestingly, Heidegger seems to believe at this point that the thinkers themselves made the adjustment to their respective epochs; this position, if it were the case, would cohere somewhat with that of Strauss, which is made even more interesting when one considers that it was almost exactly at this point in time when Strauss attended Heidegger’s lectures in Freiburg (I say ‘almost’ because Strauss in fact attended Heidegger’s 1922 summer semester courses on Aristotle (see GS 3, 690); the passages under examination here are from the 1921-22 winter semester (SU, 29)). Regardless of this provocative coincidence, the crucial difference remains Strauss’s understanding of the political reasons for making such rhetorical adjustments, ones which Heidegger does not seem to consider. As well, Heidegger ultimately rejects this position, as will be discussed below.

¹²³ As such, “the circle of understanding is not a ‘methodological’ circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293). As will be discussed forthwith, Heidegger claims that textual interpretation follows the same structure as Dasein’s interpretation of what it encounters in its *Welt*. Hence, “[t]o interpret is a double activity of explication or exegesis *and* understanding,

Also in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger explicitly discusses the example of interpretation of a text as dependent upon and participating in the categories through which Dasein interprets (*auslegt*) its world, namely ‘fore-having,’ ‘fore-sight,’ and ‘fore-conception’ (*Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorebegriff*). When Dasein interprets, the interpretation “is grounded in something we have in advance—in a forehaving” (BT, 191, emphasis removed; SZ, 150). This *Vorhabe* indicates the basis from which we interpret; in the case of a text, this would be our pre-interpretive understanding of the text itself, i.e., the way in which we encounter the text prior to interpretation. Second, interpretation “is always done under the guidance of a point of view [*der Führung einer Hinsicht*]” (BT, 191; SZ, 150), namely, a *Vorsicht*. A *Vorsicht* ‘fixes’ (*fixiert*) that which is to be interpreted in order to begin interpreting it, i.e., it determines the matter or thing to be interpreted. Finally, these two interpretive moments subtend on a particular *Vorebegriff*, which is the way in which “the interpretation has already decided for a definite conceptuality [*für eine bestimmte Begrifflichkeit entscheidend*]” (BT, 191, translation modified; SZ, 150). Heidegger claims that when we come to interpret a text, we always interpret in accordance with this preconceptual structure:

which is intrinsically situated within, or bound to, a hermeneutic situation” (Jacques Taminiaux, “The Interpretation of Aristotle’s Notion of *Aretê* in Heidegger’s First Courses,” in François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, eds., *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 14). It is important to note that for Heidegger, if interpretation of a text allows for repetition of the past possibilities of the history of ontology, then, in accordance with Heidegger’s elaboration of the ontological structure of Dasein, it is possible to have an authentic, or an inauthentic, understanding of a text. Macann elaborates: “[a]n inauthentic understanding of a text is one in which the interpreter simply assumes that there is something there to be understood and that such an understanding not only can be, but ought to be undertaken in abstraction from the ‘being-there’ of the one who interprets. By contrast, authentic understanding of the text occurs when the interpreter recognizes the inevitability of pre-conceptions, which pre-conceptions can however be made explicit in the course of the interpretation and in such a way that, in working out an understanding of the text, the interpreter also comes to an understanding of himself or herself as the one undertaking the interpretation” (“Heidegger’s Kant Interpretation,” in Christopher Macann, ed., *Critical Heidegger*, 102). Rosen would agree with this claim: “[i]nterpretation presupposes a knowledge that is derivable only from an understanding of the material to be interpreted...[this knowledge is] a self-knowledge that allows us to understand the thoughts of other human beings...[and] this point is given an ontological formulation by Heidegger” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 156).

[a]n interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation [*Textinterpretation*], one likes to appeal to what ‘stands there’ [*dasteht*’], then one finds that what ‘stands there’ in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption [*Vormeinung*] of the interpreter. (BT, 191-192, translation modified; SZ, 150)¹²⁴

It is important to note that Strauss would agree with this claim. As was discussed above, for him interpretation fundamentally depends upon the character of the interpreter, and hence for Strauss as for Heidegger, a presuppositionless interpretation of a text is impossible.¹²⁵

For Heidegger, hermeneutic activity is a “deconstructive regress,” one which “carries out its tasks only on the path of destruction” (SU, 124). The concept of *Destruktion* is the essential feature of Heidegger’s approach to the history of philosophy as expressed in the Introduction to *Sein und Zeit*, and this brief discussion can be seen as a drawing

¹²⁴ Hence, “[t]hat which one *seeks* to understand has always already been understood in advance, though this understanding in advance may not have, and usually has not, been rendered thematic” (Macann, “Heidegger’s Kant Interpretation,” 101, author’s emphasis).

¹²⁵ On the idea of ‘presuppositionless’ readings of texts, see also SU, 112. On this point, it seems that Tom Rockmore’s assessment that Heidegger possesses a “metaphysical realist view of textual interpretation,” in the sense that “the early Heidegger believes that interpretation yields valid claims to know in determining meanings independent of the interpreter” (“Heidegger’s Uses of Plato and the History of Philosophy,” in Partenie and Tom Rockmore, eds., *Heidegger and Plato: Toward Dialogue* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 193), is incorrect. *Destruktion* permits the interpreter to come to the tradition of philosophy free from traditional interpretations of that tradition, but in doing so, that interpreter still participates in the ontological structure, ultimately determined by the finitude of Dasein, in which all interpretations are and must be conducted. For Heidegger as well as for himself, Gadamer claims that “[a] person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there” (*Truth and Method*, 267). John D. Caputo puts the point in no uncertain terms: “[w]e can learn something new only on the condition that we have already been appropriately oriented to begin with. We can understand only if we already pre-understand. There are no pure, uninterpreted facts of the matter but only beings already set forth in a certain frame, projected in their proper Being” (*Radical Hermeneutics*, 61). Caputo here is speaking specifically about how Dasein encounters *Seiendes*, but exactly the same notion applies to interpretation of a text. Elaborating on the consequences of Heidegger’s position, Löwith critically remarks that “the presuppositions [of the interpreter—DT] which have been brought along cannot be secured, just as there is no requirement that the presuppositions of the text to be interpreted be recognized and acknowledged in order that we be able to understand the text without presuppositions” (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 103). Without wishing to claim a critical difference between their respective methods of interpretation, Löwith here seems to imply that it is a goal to ‘understand the text without presuppositions.’ By contrast, cf. Strauss’s discussion of the necessity, but *subordinate* necessity, of a grasp of the “extraneous information,” or presuppositions, of a text in order to interpret it (PAW, 159).

together of Heidegger's various strands of thought concerning interpretation I have just identified. As I discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, *Destruktion* is not merely or even primarily a negative activity, but rather brings to light, or 'unconceals,' the "positive possibilities of [the] tradition" (BT, 44; SZ, 22). The process of *Destruktion* is a rereading of the history of ontology in order to see at which points and in what way *Sein* has been understood in relation to time. *Destruktion* is thus what permits the repetition of the latent possibilities inherent in the texts of past thinkers in light of the parameters of the *Seinsfrage*, the most important being that "the interpretation of time [is] the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (BT, 19, emphasis removed; SZ, 1).¹²⁶ As Heidegger's early approach to Plato, which I will briefly discuss forthwith, indicates, for him reading a philosophical text is always an act of creative *Destruktion*, i.e., of novel repetition of radical possibilities inherent in the text that the author did not, nor could not, understand. Hence, it is necessary to follow the hermeneutic principle that later thinkers better understood earlier thinkers' thought, for that which is most radical, the unexpressed understanding of *Sein* in relation to time, is only understood by those who come after. For Heidegger, writing at a time immediately after the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, "every interpretation must necessarily use violence," in order "to place itself within the unsaid and force it into speech" (KPM, 141; GA 3, 202).¹²⁷ The unsaid, the unexpressed understanding

¹²⁶ "The ultimate measure of Heidegger's interpretations of the history of philosophy is the standpoint of questioning presupposed in *Being and Time*" (Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 102).

¹²⁷ For Löwith, Heidegger's violent interpretations of a text "complement" his hermeneutic subtlety: "[h]is violence in carrying out his fore-having is concealed in the subtlety of the interpretation, in such a way that the subtlety serves the violence" (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 106). Löwith here is drawing a distinction between Heidegger's method and his intention, and emphasizing the radicality inherent in the intention which is not immediately apparent in the method. Such radicality can lead to Catalin Partenie stating starkly that *Destruktion* implies that "one will metaphorically murder that work's author" ("Imprint: Heidegger's Interpretation of the Platonic Dialectic in the *Sophist* Lectures (1924-1925)," in *Heidegger and Plato*, 42). For Caputo, "[t]he 'violence' of hermeneutics is 'natural,' for it is dictated by the structure of the self-withdrawing Being" (*Radical Hermeneutics*, 63). Being's self-withdrawal thus warrants violent interpretation. For other commentators, Heidegger describing his hermeneutic method as 'violent' may have

of *Sein*, remains concealed in a text and must be wrested free through hermeneutic *Destruktion*. Further, it must be understood that such *Destruktion* is carried out as the propaedeutic of the general task of attempting, in *Sein und Zeit*, to develop a ‘fundamental ontology,’ and as such is one part of the “basic components of the phenomenological method” (BP, 23). *Destruktion* allows us to understand the history of ontology anew, and thereby to grasp that history anew in order to free it for the task of Dasein’s novel *Wiederholung* of the latent radical possibilities within that history.¹²⁸

In 1924-1925, and at the same time as he was composing *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger conducted a seminar on Plato’s *Sophist* which was eventually published in 1992. In this seminar, Heidegger clearly expresses what he calls a “principle of hermeneutics,” namely “that interpretation should proceed from the clear to the obscure” (PS, 8; GA 19, 11). This principle gives Heidegger license thereby to interpret Plato’s dialogue in light of conclusions reached through a reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Heidegger justifies this apparent reversal of the assumed correct interpretive trajectory by noting that

[w]e will presuppose that Aristotle understood Plato. Even those who only have a rough acquaintance with Aristotle will see from the level of his work that it is no bold assertion to maintain that Aristotle understood Plato. No

been overstated. Speaking of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche, Lampert asserts that “Heidegger’s exegesis of texts results in interpretations of the doctrines that are not entirely novel or original—a fitting result for an exegete” (Lampert, “Heidegger’s Nietzsche Interpretation,” *Man and World*, Vol. 7 (1974), 369).

¹²⁸ “*Destruktion* then, was merely another form of retrieval, for in de-structuring the past, one reclaimed it for the present and the future” (Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 212). In the same way, Löwith states that “destruction of the history of ontology is related negatively not to the past but rather to the ‘present.’ It is indirectly a critique of the present... [one which] is made explicit for the first time in the rectoral address” (*Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 80). Löwith thus directly connects *Destruktion* with Heidegger’s political position found in the *Rektoratsrede*: the idea of ‘loosening up’ the tradition of ontology in order to unearth the latent possibilities inherent in that tradition is a direct critique of present ‘ossified’ hermeneutic strategy, much as the *Rektoratsrede*’s exhortations to “will the essence of the German university” (“The Self-Assertion of the German University,” in Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy*, 38) are a direct critique of present ‘ossified’ political existence. We see the idea of rejection and simultaneous avowal echoed in Heidegger’s position that “[w]hen a philosopher turns to philosophy’s own history he must realize that this tradition constitutes that from which he think as well as that from which he, to some degree at least, must try to get away” (Joseph J. Kockelmans, “Destructive Retrieve and Hermeneutic Phenomenology in *Being and Time*, in Sallis, ed., *Radical Phenomenology*, 117-118).

more than it is to say in general on the question of understanding that the later ones always understand their predecessors better than the predecessors understood themselves. Precisely here lies the element of creative research [*schöpferischen Forschung*], that in what is most decisive this research does not understand itself [*daß sie sich selbst im Entscheidenden nicht versteht*]. (PS, 8; GA 19, 11)

Heidegger, echoing and at the same time radicalizing Kant,¹²⁹ assumes at the outset that access to earlier thinkers is limited to creative interpretation of those thinkers. The notion that there is a ‘true’ teaching to be discovered, and that it is the author’s intent to put this teaching forth, is dismissed at the outset. As Heidegger says, “[a]n appeal to supertemporal and eternal values [*überzeitlich und ewige Werte*] and the like is not needed to justify historical research” (PS, 158, translation modified; GA 19, 229). Rather, the most ‘creative researchers,’ the most important figures in the history of philosophy, contain at the heart of their work a radical element that the researchers themselves do not understand.¹³⁰ The ‘decisive thing’ (*Entscheidenden*) in a thinker is that which is most radical and thus is least understood. Plato, then, can only be understood through a thinker posterior to him, in this case Aristotle, as the most radical element of Plato’s thought was not understood by Plato himself: “[w]hat Aristotle said is what Plato placed at his disposal, only it is more radically and more scientifically developed” (PS, 8, translation modified; GA 19, 11-12).¹³¹

Heidegger holds to this claim even in the scattered remarks concerning textual interpretation in his later works. As an indicative example, in *Was heißt Denken?* (based on

¹²⁹ See n. 3 above.

¹³⁰ “Curious as it may sound, [for Heidegger,] the best interpretation of Plato will not be about Plato; it will be about the topic evinced in the Platonic text” (Richard Polt, “Heidegger’s Topical Hermeneutics: The *Sophist* Lectures,” in Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, eds., *Heidegger Reexamined Vol. 2: Truth, Realism, and the History of Being* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 64).

¹³¹ As such, Heidegger claims much later, “Aristotle thinks Being in a more Greek way” than Plato (*Nietzsche*, vol. 4, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1979), 171). For Heidegger, Aristotle radicalizes the inherent direction of Greek thought already present in Plato but unknown to him. Zuckert emphasizes that Heidegger is *not* “suggesting that Aristotle was a superior philosopher or that there is an inevitable progress in the development of human understanding. Aristotle would not have been able to clarify and develop Plato’s concepts of Being and philosophy, if Plato had not thought them out beforehand as far as he did” (*Postmodern Platos*, 37).

lectures from 1951 and 1952, and published in 1954), Heidegger says that the notion of understanding past thinkers as they understood themselves is “impossible, because no thinker—and no poet—understands himself [*sich selbst versteht*]” (WT, 185; WD, 113).¹³² This claim depends on Heidegger’s understanding of the history of philosophy, i.e., as a series of encounters between thinkers and particular dispensations of *Sein*, ones of which the thinkers themselves were not aware.¹³³ Further, it is fair to say that the later Heidegger rejects a ‘method’ of hermeneutics entirely. During this period, Heidegger speaks more of the task of following the ‘way’ of a particular thinker than that of providing a particular methodological structure to undertake interpretation.¹³⁴ For Heidegger,

there is no universal schema which could be applied mechanically to the interpretation of the writings of thinkers, or even to a single work of a single thinker. A dialogue of Plato—the *Phaedrus*, for example, the conversation on Beauty—can be interpreted in totally different spheres and respects, according to totally different implications and problematics. This multiplicity of possible interpretations does not discredit the strictness of the thought content. For all

¹³² I am indebted to Ward (“Political Philosophy and History,” 280) for drawing my attention to this passage.

¹³³ Stated succinctly, “Heidegger maintains that all fundamental historical changes in man’s understanding are products of the disclosure of Being itself” (Lawrence Lampert, “On Heidegger and Historicism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (June 1974), 587). Elsewhere, Lampert remarks that “[t]his is the cardinal point in Heidegger’s philosophy: the fundamental relationships in the history of philosophy are not between philosophers but between the individual philosopher and his subject matter, a subject matter Heidegger calls ‘that which gives itself to be thought’ or that which the thinker is given to think” (“Heidegger’s Nietzsche Interpretation,” 362). This initially seems similar to the picture Meier paints of Strauss’s hermeneutic approach, which ostensibly allows for “a return from the history of philosophy to the intention of the philosopher,” as well as the fact that “the individual ‘contribution’ of a philosopher can direct our attention to the truly individual understanding of the necessarily anonymous truth” (*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 72). The central difference is, as I have discussed in the context of the section on ‘nature’ above, that for Strauss, the ‘truth’ is something permanent and stable, namely, the permanent and stable questions of philosophy which persist at all times and at all places. For Heidegger, on the contrary, the ‘truth’ or Being is temporal, and hence subject to the vicissitudes of history. As Velkley states, “in Strauss’s view Heidegger does not distinguish the awareness of the fundamental problems from the historical efforts at solutions to it. Hence for Heidegger, the question of Being—which always manifests itself in particular ‘dispensations’—has itself an historical and variable character” (“On the Roots of Rationalism,” 256).

¹³⁴ “It is true that, as it understands itself, thinking in terms of the history of being no longer talks about *method*. Instead it replaces methodological considerations with reflections on the *way* or *pathway* of thinking. In thinking in terms of the history of being, the words *way* or *path of thinking* are not used as metaphors. If we recall that *way* or ὁδὸς is the Greek root word in the word *method*—a coming together of the Greek words μεθ and ὁδὸς —then we are called to understand, in this reflection of ‘way,’ the transformed shape of hermeneutic phenomenology” (Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, “Way and Method: Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Thinking the History of Being,” in Macann, ed., *Critical Heidegger*, 173).

true thought remains open to more than one interpretation—and this by reason of its nature. (WT, 71; WD 68)¹³⁵

Heidegger sounds remarkably similar to Strauss here, except when one considers that for Strauss, one must be guided in interpretation by the goal to understand how the author understood him- or herself. For Heidegger, this is impossible; there is a multiplicity of interpretations as a function of the greatness of the text, but there is no one interpretation which would express authorial intent. Heidegger thus uncouples the thoughts of a great thinker from that thinker's intention. The thinking is regarded as a 'way' which is *opened* by the thinker but not fundamentally *determined* by that thinker. For Heidegger, "when we take this way, we come to the point where we, in thought and in inquiry, retrace the questioning of a thinker by starting from his own thinking and from nowhere else" (WT, 185; WD, 113). Interpretation becomes allowing oneself to be guided in some way by the path upon which the originary thinker embarked; to ask for translations of the metaphors is to miss Heidegger's point.¹³⁶ For Heidegger, thinking in such a 'way' is absolutely other to thinking that is composed "merely in propositional statements" (*On Time and Being*, 24); this is an example of philosophy conducted in accordance with a principle of 'reason,' which for Heidegger is "the most stubborn adversary of thinking" (*Off the Beaten Track*, 199; GA 5, 267).¹³⁷ Finally, as if in response to Strauss and commentators who follow him,

¹³⁵ I am indebted to Brague ("Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought," 64) for indicating this passage.

¹³⁶ In exhorting us to follow his way of approaching philosophic texts, Heidegger thus gives us "an invitation...to take up his own way of thinking with the full recognition that it cannot be validated externally" (Lampert, "On Heidegger and Historicism," 590), i.e., validated in accordance to any sort of methodological principle that claims to discover what is 'really there' in the text.

¹³⁷ Without pursuing this point in much detail, it is important at least to note Heidegger's reason for this change: "[p]ropositionality—that is, conceptuality, interpretation, cognition—is an obstacle to our access to being. This explains Heidegger's attraction to poetry as a form of thinking, for poetry eschews propositional-conceptual representation in favour of a more direct and evocative encounter with being;" as such, Heidegger's shift concerning textual interpretation may be seen as a "disciplined response to a philosophical aporia that besets his early conception of ontology" (William Blattner, "Ontology, the A Priori, and the

Heidegger states that “[a] proper commentary...never understands the text better than its author understood it, though it certainly understands it differently,” due to the fact that a commentary “must also, imperceptibly and without being too insistent, add something of its own to [a text], from its substance” (*Off the Beaten Track*, 160; GA 5, 213).¹³⁸ But, to understand an author differently is to claim to hold a hermeneutic perspective that does not permit access to the ‘true’ teaching of an author, a perspective which past authors seemed to believe.¹³⁹ Hence, Heidegger believes himself to have a hermeneutic approach which is an *advance* from earlier ones, for he has uncovered the inherent temporal qualities of interpretation rooted in the ontological structure of Dasein.¹⁴⁰ So, he in fact believes he understands past thinkers better than they understood themselves.¹⁴¹

Primacy of Practice: An Aporia in Heidegger’s Early Philosophy,” in Crowell and Malpas, eds., *Transcendental Heidegger*, 26-27).

¹³⁸ Heidegger’s interpretation “is an inter-pretation that construes, in which something is inserted, and it is a trans-position of the text into another language which purports to the ‘the same’” (Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 106).

¹³⁹ “Heidegger’s undertaking supposes...that the original [i.e., the ‘true intention’ of the thinker—DT] never existed, that it is not an intention, either, but a possibility” (Brague, “Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought,” 73). This ‘possibility’ is that which is possible to repeat through appropriative interpretation of the text.

¹⁴⁰ Brague’s “Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought” provides many provocative claims concerning Heidegger’s purported radicality, perhaps the most provocative of which being that “Heidegger’s understanding could be described as an endeavour to be *the ancient of the ancients*” (72, author’s emphasis), i.e., to show that the history of philosophy beginning with the pre-Socratics never understood the inherent and more primordial *temporality* of the philosophical enterprise. *Destruktion* finally “shows the ‘meaning’ of Being to be finite time and eternity to be an illusion” (Löwith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 76). Here we notice that for Löwith, Heidegger’s way of reading provokes one of Strauss’s main points of criticism, namely that Heideggerian “[h]istoricizing means the forgetting of eternity” (FPP, 75). Kockelmans holds the same conception of Heidegger: “[i]n his opinion, each ‘experience’ [of Being—DT] is to be mediated from the perspective of Being. It is in this perspective that man understands his own Being in its full potentialities so that he can compare each mode of Being, present in each experience, with the whole of possibilities and thus understand its genuine, limited meaning;” such a perspective is necessarily “finite” (“Destructive Retrieve and Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” in Sallis, ed., *Radical Phenomenology*, 119).

¹⁴¹ I follow the example of Lampert here, who states that “we need not be deflected by [Heidegger’s] caveat of modesty. It is quite misleading. In the end, there is nothing modest about Heidegger’s claims for his interpretations, nor could he be committed to a relativism that takes his own interpretations as merely one optional perspective among others. No, the secrets that crawl into the light of Heidegger’s sun are the hitherto unrevealed realities that have only now been disclosed” (“Heidegger’s Nietzsche Interpretation,” 354). It is important to remember, pointed out by Taylor Carman, that “what is at stake in the interpretation of the text is nothing merely factual, but *normative*, namely *how* to understand the text, how it *ought* to be read”

Heidegger's hermeneutic approach, it must be stated again, is what permitted Strauss to approach texts in the way that he did. Strauss writes that "by uprooting and not simply rejecting the tradition of philosophy, [Heidegger] made it possible for the first time after many centuries—one hesitates to say how many—to see the roots of the tradition as they are" (JCPM, 450). Thus, it seems that Strauss in fact depends on Heidegger's previous work in order to encounter and respond to the tradition appropriately.¹⁴² Heidegger believed *Destruktion* to be a "loosening up [*Auflockerung*]" (BT, 44; SZ, 22)¹⁴³ of the tradition in order to free that tradition from the scholarly approach which conceals its inherent radicality. Strauss's retrieval of the possibility of esoteric writing is an advance from this basic starting point. Heidegger and Strauss also believe that the qualities of the interpreter determine the subsequent interpretation of a text. For Heidegger, "[t]he past opens itself up only in accord with the degree of resoluteness and the power of the *capacity* to disclose it that the present has available to it. The primordially of a philosophical interpretation is determined by the particular *competence* and sureness in which the philosophical research in question maintains itself and its questions" (SU, 112, my emphasis). For both Heidegger and Strauss, the *intention and ability* of the interpreter, specifically the intention and ability to approach philosophical texts in the way that philosophy itself demands, is what determines the quality of interpretation. Only in this way does a text show itself as it is, in the sense of its inherent radicality in opposition to its placement in the sedimentary history

("Phenomenology as Rigorous Science," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24-25, author's emphasis).

¹⁴² Ward "suggest[s] that Heidegger's close reading of Aristotle, which so impressed the young Strauss, is an early model for what we have come to regard as the characteristically Straussian approach to interpretation" ("Political Philosophy and History," 278).

¹⁴³ Cf. Heidegger's use of the same terminology in SU, 124.

of philosophy.¹⁴⁴ Finally, both Heidegger and Strauss present their respective hermeneutic approaches as ones which are ‘in fidelity to the things themselves,’ in the sense that each approach claims to follow what the texts themselves present.¹⁴⁵

Even given these similarities, though, it seems that Heidegger’s and Strauss’s respective methods of or approaches to reading a text are ultimately incompatible. From Heidegger’s perspective, Strauss’s method, assuming *authorial* intent, may in fact miss the unsaid and unintended expression of a meaning of *Sein* inherent in the thought of all epoch-making thinkers. Conversely, from Strauss’s perspective, Heidegger misses the bifurcation of the exoteric and the esoteric,¹⁴⁶ intended by the particular thinker, which in turn corresponds to the bifurcation (as well as the concomitant unification) of theoretical and practical knowledge. Most importantly, Strauss’s belief that there is a temporally stable or permanent ‘teaching’ present in a text, or at least that one must be assumed to exist for the purposes of interpretation, is in direct opposition to Heidegger’s claim that the possibilities

¹⁴⁴ “[T]he interpretation of the past of philosophy could only be a reappropriation of the present where the power of elucidation is measured by the radicality of the interpreter’s philosophical interrogation” (Taminaux, “The Interpretation of Aristotle’s Notion of *Aretê*,” 14).

¹⁴⁵ In using the term ‘fidelity,’ I am following the usage of Polt (“Heidegger’s Topical Hermeneutics,” 57).

¹⁴⁶ Thus, to emphasize, Heidegger’s method of interpretation disallows the proper view, from Strauss’s perspective, of the political reasons for writing in such a way and consequently in properly understanding texts written in such a way. Michael Allen Gillespie remarks that “Heidegger often seems to overlook the distinction of the public teaching and the private or ‘secret’ teaching so characteristic of ancient thought and simply to adopt the public teaching as *the* teaching” (*Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 168). Velkley claims that Heidegger’s position is a result of his “divorce of questioning from any natural-teleological basis...Such questioning is unable to see clearly the political-moral phenomena which must nourish it; a questioning that cannot see these phenomena cannot gain true distance on them, and so risks becoming their slave” (“Freedom From the Good,” in *Logos and Eros*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe, 259). Bambach holds a similar view: “in returning to the philosophical/poetic origin—whether as Heraclitean *logos* or as Hölderlinian *Heimkehr*—there is a danger that one might forget the origin of philosophy and poetry in the world of the polis” (*Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 261-262). Coincidentally, a more succinct description of Strauss’s view of the consequences of Heidegger’s thought is unlikely to be found. By contrast, Partenie believes that “[f]or Heidegger the everyday life that pervades Plato’s dialogues embodies the real *archê* of philosophy, and it should not be ignored but treasured as a rare indication that philosophy should start out of the concrete texture of our lives” (“Imprint,” in Partenie and Rockmore, eds., *Heidegger and Plato: Toward Dialogue*, 57). The problem with this claim is that Heidegger seemingly disregards the most ‘concrete’ aspect of human life, its *political* character and its subsequent entanglement with the world of conventional opinion.

inherent in a text must be repeated anew for each historical epoch. It seems that a decision must be made as to which approach to follow. To be somewhat partisan, though, it seems to me that Strauss's method better satisfies the phenomenological caveat of 'letting things show themselves as they would show themselves,' one which Heidegger, at least at the time of *Sein und Zeit*, claims to endorse. Due to his claim that every interpretation is an isolated and tenuous act,¹⁴⁷ Strauss's lack of 'methodology' concerning reading allows him to approach each text under scrutiny solely in terms of the text itself, i.e., what *the text itself* provides about how to interpret it. Heidegger, conversely, begins with a presupposition, that of the unsaid understanding of *Sein* evident in the text itself only in a concealed way, due to it being held *unknowingly* by the writer.¹⁴⁸ All of this being said, this proves precisely *nothing* of the truth or falsity of Heidegger's position. If Heidegger somehow received an insight concerning the truth about the whole, e.g., as a sending from *Sein*, the argumentation for that insight almost does not matter. With this remark, we are close to calling Heidegger a 'prophet.' I will now conclude with some remarks closely connected to both this appellation and its relation to the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* which the conflict between Strauss and Heidegger re-enacts. I now propose a reversal of the structure

¹⁴⁷ Because of this conception of interpretation, for Strauss "*the tradition and the continuity disappears [sic] once one begins to interpret*" ("Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 6, Strauss's emphasis). Here we can see a glaring difference between Strauss's position and that of Heidegger; as Brague describes it, "[w]ith Heidegger, ... what has to be understood is not an individual work, or some particular group of works (e.g. the ancients and the moderns), but the history of metaphysics as a whole" ("Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought," 73).

¹⁴⁸ "...for Heidegger, what is most true about a thinker is not what he intends to say, but what he takes for granted. We must interpret what he actually says in terms of what he unwillingly accepts: we understand even the greatest thinkers better than they understood themselves" (Mark Blitz, "Heidegger and Postmodernism," *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 24 (Spring 1995), 78). For Blitz, then, Heidegger is the quintessential example of what Strauss would consider to be a modern thinker. However, in the end, when confronting Heidegger and Strauss we must heed Gillespie's warning that "[t]he interpretation of silence is always treacherous regardless of whether that silence is understood as the unspoken or as the unthought" (*Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History*, 168).

of this chapter, an excursion backwards through the concepts of reading, ‘first’ philosophy, and finally nature, in order to show the ultimate undesirability of resolving this conflict.

3.4 Conclusion

According to Strauss, Heidegger reads philosophy in the wrong fashion, holding unexamined premises which colour his view of the text itself. Yet, at the same time, Heidegger’s thought was absolutely critical for the development of Strauss’s project. Heidegger’s work allowed for “the possibility of a genuine return to classical philosophy, to the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, a return with open eyes and in full clarity about the infinite difficulties which it entails” (“An Unspoken Prologue,” JPCM, 450). Heidegger rejected his contemporaneous interpreters’ views of Aristotle and Plato in an attempt to ascertain what the ancients actually said. The *Destruktion* of the history of ontology was to permit access to this goal. The problem, for Strauss, was that Heidegger was still a modern in the way he read philosophic texts. Heidegger, following Kant, believed himself to have the privileged position from which to interpret past thinkers, as each past thinker possessed within his or her writing an unexamined understanding of the meaning of *Sein* which remained unsaid in that thinker’s writings. Hence, Heidegger held that it is only those who come after, those who ‘dwell within’ the thought of a previous thinker but who also expand and recapitulate that thought, who can discover that which remains unsaid. Due to this presupposition, claims Strauss, Heidegger missed the most important key to interpreting Platonic dialogues properly: the technique of esoteric writing.

If esoteric writing exists, as Strauss’s analyses seem to prove, then the reasons for its existence are themselves likely to exist. If this is the case, then philosophy must be in the

first place political philosophy, i.e., philosophy conducted in relation to politics and the political. For Heidegger, the political is always understood in relation to ontology, or, more precisely, subservient to ontology. Hence, first philosophy is necessarily ontology. However, if Strauss is right and human beings are in the first place political (rather than ontological, as Heidegger claims), then Strauss's concept of first philosophy better suits the phenomenological rallying cry, 'to the things themselves!' This is because 'the things themselves,' or more generally, the way objects first appear to human beings, is fundamentally political in character. Expressed in other words: in the cave, we see objects only by the light of the fire. It is necessary, then, to begin philosophy with an examination of these objects, understanding that the way they appear to us is, in the first place, in light of the reigning opinions of the regime in which we find ourselves.

Finally, Heidegger's concept of nature as most fundamentally ontological is, in a sense, correct for Strauss, but Heidegger's approach to nature through ontology conditions that concept erroneously. Strauss certainly would not argue with Heidegger concerning the fundamental task of philosophy, i.e., an attempt to understand the meaning of *Sein* or the whole. However, Strauss would take issue with the concept of nature present in Heidegger. For both early and late Heidegger, nature is primarily understood to be the totality of *Seiendes im Ganze*, and hence must be examined ontologically, asking the question about those *Seiendes* in their *Sein*. Strauss considers Heidegger to have missed the fundamental notion: that nature only appears as nature in contrast with convention. If this is the case, the 'natural' is only discoverable by contrast with the 'conventional,' or, in other words, the 'political.' At the same time, Strauss holds that the 'first things' or the most fundamental objects of philosophical study are the 'fundamental problems.' This means that, for Strauss, nature or the whole is postulated as eternal, but can never be demonstrated to be so. If such

a demonstration existed, it would signal the end of philosophy and the beginning of wisdom. Nature and its status remains a permanent problem for Strauss, due to his conception of philosophy as permanently zetetic.

It is on this point that we can clearly see how Strauss and Heidegger each take a side of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Strauss defines this conflict as fundamentally a “radical modification of premodern political philosophy—a modification which comes to sight first as a rejection of premodern political philosophy” (“The Three Waves of Modernity,” 83). This radical modification consists of the change of the purpose of philosophy, understood by the ancients as primarily to explain the whole, but understood by the moderns as primarily to relieve humanity’s misery. As Strauss says, for the moderns, “philosophy or science was no longer to be understood as essentially contemplative and proud but as active and charitable” (CM, 3). For Strauss, the conflict turns on the relative importance of the concept of human individuality: for the ancients, “[m]an is by nature a social being” (NRH, 129); for the moderns, “the natural is the individual” (NRH, 323). For ancient thought, human happiness “is the same for the individual and the city” (CM, 49). For modern thought, conversely, happiness is a result of universal progress towards “ever greater prosperity” (CM, 4). This in turn results in the breaking down of heterogeneous political life, with its concomitant conflict over scarce resources used to satisfy the desires of distinct populations, in favour of the homogeneous universal state in which the desires of all are satisfied (CM, 4). If the universal state arises, political philosophy is finished, as the perfect political regime, that which political philosophy holds as an unrealizable ideal

towards which to strive, will have in fact been enacted.¹⁴⁹ In rejecting the concept of a universal society, Heidegger's thought reflects these conceptions of happiness and political philosophy in the most radical way: Dasein makes an *eigentlich* decision when it chooses apart from, and in opposition to, those offered by *das Man*. Dasein, and thus the human being, is radically individual, and the majority of Heidegger's task in *Sein und Zeit* is to interrogate this *Seiende*, as an instantiation of praxis or practical life, in order to discover the meaning of its *Sein*. This discovery is then considered as a contribution or a step toward the further theoretical consideration of the discovery of the meaning of *Sein* in general. Political philosophy can only be secondary, if it exists at all, in such a theoretical conception.

As was mentioned in the General Introduction, Strauss considers the theologico-political problem to be *the* theme of his mature work. As I have argued, Strauss's claim concerning Heidegger's purported religiosity becomes clearer if we consider the problems of religion and politics as unified in the theologico-political problem, and if we consider this conception in relation to philosophy as Strauss understands it. However, Strauss's understanding of the problem seemingly gives little hope in overcoming Heidegger's thought. If revelation, understood as related to the political, is a permanent challenge to reason, then Heidegger's thought—properly understood—can be seen as a permanent challenge to Strauss's thought—properly understood. To end with this insurmountable difficulty is ultimately unsatisfying; it seems that we require a great thinker, a grand synthesizer who can draw together the separate and opposed strands of Heidegger and Strauss in order to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem. However, I close this

¹⁴⁹ Opposing conceptions of 'happiness' and 'the individual' form much of the matter of debate between Strauss and Alexandre Kojève, published in *On Tyranny*. See n. 78 above for a discussion of Strauss's reference to Heidegger in the context of this debate.

chapter with two quotes from Strauss, both of which also found in the General Introduction to this thesis, concerning his position on the issue. The first is that “the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger” (“Existentialism, 305). For Strauss, the source of the problem is the only figure possibly capable of providing a solution. The second quote, however, gives new light to the issue: the conflict between reason and revelation, between Jerusalem and Athens, “is the secret of the vitality of Western civilization” (JPCM, 116). If the tension between reason and revelation stands as the basis of all of Strauss’s other binary oppositions, philosophy and politics, ancients and moderns, etc., then each of those tensions in some way contributes to the continued existence and vitality of Western civilization. The conflict between Strauss and Heidegger which I have discussed in this chapter exemplifies such a contribution. I do not believe that Strauss would ultimately want a resolution to the conflict between his position and that of Heidegger, both because it is not possible, and because it is not desirable. The only movement away from or in opposition to Heidegger that Strauss would want is recognition of the fact that if Heidegger is correct, there is no escape from the ‘second cave.’ Because of our historical situation, then, “we need a nonhistoricist understanding of historicism, that is, an understanding of the genesis of historicism that does not take for granted the soundness of historicism” (NRH, 33). It is hoped that my analysis of Strauss’s critique of Heidegger has contributed to this understanding.

Concluding Remarks

I believe that Strauss, for his part, never ceases to entertain, and to wrestle with, the possibility that the crucial insights of radical historicism might be in a decisive sense sound.

—Thomas Pangle, *Leo Strauss: An Introduction to his Thought and Intellectual Legacy*

The above analysis ultimately leaves us with two mutually opposed positions. Heidegger's thought, from the perspective of Strauss, is an admixture of modern philosophical tendencies and religious thinking, while at the same time rejecting the conventional opinions concerning things in the world, political in character, as being the avenue by which to attain philosophical truth. Hence, for Strauss, Heidegger ultimately cannot grasp the permanent philosophical significance, or necessity, of those opinions. Strauss's thought, from the perspective of Heidegger, is a philosophical obscuring of the true history of philosophy as responses to encounters with *Sein*, and thereby an obscuring of human beings' highest mode of comportment toward what *Sein* gives, a mode which is accomplished ultimately through pious interrogation of *Sein* in a poetic mode. For Heidegger, the opinions which make up the evaluative structure of political life themselves presume an unthought understanding of *Sein*, and are thus only properly understood through ontology. As was mentioned at the end of the last chapter, there is a possibility that the mutual opposition between these two thinkers is fruitful, in the sense that the tension between them finally shows both some of the essential questions of philosophical activity and two of the fundamental alternatives which serve as responses to those questions. If philosophy and religion are permanently in tension, as Strauss believes they are, then they also mutually 'check' each other: each, properly understood, refutes the other while also recognizing the essential limitations of any attempt at refutation. Strauss's remarks suggest that the tension should only be viewed as a theoretical antagonism; on the practical level,

the tension produces the ‘secret vitality of the West’ and hence must be preserved.¹ Heidegger ignores or rejects the two-sided philosophical problem of religion—God both as a creator of the cosmos and the creator of the law with which human beings are to live in accordance. This position ultimately belies the specifically modern character of his thought. It thereby disallows him from recognizing and eliminating the religious elements present in his own thought. It also thereby gives him license, in accordance with what Strauss understands as his philosophical mania, to attempt to absorb aspects of religion which, according to Strauss, are proper only to religion’s domain. Therefore, Heidegger, as modern, cannot grasp the ultimate significance of the theologico-political problem, i.e., its significance for the most basic philosophical question of the best way of life,² due to his decision, conscious or not, to side with the moderns in their *querelle* with the ancients.

However, Strauss’s thought, it must be stated, is ambivalent concerning how one should decide concerning the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. To recognize the debate as a tension between two historically-delimited ways of thought, a concept foreign to ancient philosophy, means that Strauss himself must necessarily be modern.³ It seems that in (re)enacting the quarrel, it is necessary at least to sympathize with a side. The temptation to side with Heidegger over Strauss, or vice versa, is perhaps necessary if philosophy as each thinker respectively understands it is to continue. Ultimately, the

¹ “By referring to this conflict as a fundamental tension we indicate our belief that a relatively peaceful coexistence on a practical plane is both possible and desirable, especially when the *raison d’être* of both antagonists is under attack from powerful opponents who deny the very possibility of transhistorical goals” (Berns, “The Prescientific World and Historicism,” in Udoff, ed., *Leo Strauss’s Thought*, 179).

² Strauss identifies this significance most clearly by contrasting the examples of Abraham and Socrates, both of whom purportedly receiving divine commandment, yet each understanding the proper practical consequences of that commandment in opposing ways. Abraham “obeys the command unhesitatingly,” while Socrates begins by “examining an unintelligible saying of Apollo” (JPCM, 110).

³ This has been noted by other commentators, e.g., Stanley Rosen: “[b]y publishing [his] observations [concerning the tension between Jerusalem and Athens], and indeed by devoting virtually his entire professional career to an exposé of the political rhetoric of philosophers, or the distinction between their esoteric and exoteric teachings, Strauss tacitly but unmistakably identified himself as a modern” (*Hermeneutics as Politics*, 112).

decision concerning which philosophical approach to uphold may come down to the temperament of the individual. It is the individual, the student of philosophy, who makes the final decision as to which philosophical approach best describes human experience. Both Heidegger and Strauss claim that they begin their philosophic projects with consideration of the everyday experience of human beings and proceed from that beginning. The difference between them, as well as the reason why each thinker's project stands in opposition to the other, is at least indicated, if not defined, by their respective understanding and subsequent treatment of 'the everyday.' This distinction can also be understood as their differing conceptions of the way in which things are disclosed or revealed to us, and thus is connected to their respective understandings of truth. For both Heidegger and Strauss, things first appear to us as things through or as a result of something fundamentally not us, not the individual (*Sein* for Heidegger, the firelight of the cave for Strauss). As well, both thinkers believe the truth to be revealed in fragments, and that any dogmatic adherence to what is thereby revealed results in the ossification of the necessarily partial truth into an authority for what can be considered true. The relation between the individual and what is beyond the individual, and how this relation is to be understood as instantiating truth, is at the centre of both thinkers' respective projects.

The choice for one thinker over the thus other depends, primarily, on what one considers to be 'first philosophy,' understood as the 'highest' or most important task of philosophical investigation—the way by which to gain truth. The choice offered by these two thinkers concerning first philosophy is between ontology and political philosophy. However, by Strauss's own remarks, his conception of the 'highest' goal of philosophy is

an articulation of the whole and the relations between all of its parts,⁴ which therefore requires a particular conception of in what sense those parts *are*, which thus requires ontology. At bottom, Strauss's and Heidegger's projects dovetail. The fundamental difference is that, as was mentioned above, for Strauss the only avenue to an adequate articulation of the whole is through the opinions about the whole, opinions which the philosopher can never fully discard. Philosophy is, for Strauss, an *ascent* to contemplation of the whole. It cannot, in Heideggerian ontological fashion, *begin* there. Conversely, for Heidegger, politics and political things, proper to the realm of opinion, are determined as merely one domain of *Seienden*. They are thus properly understood as a mere secondary function of human beings' more ordinary relation to *Sein*. Strauss's conception of philosophy beginning with and remaining rooted in political life, i.e., considering the realm proper to it as a source of truth about the whole or what is, is simply a recapitulation of the obscuring of the meaning of the *Sein* of political *Seienden*. For Heidegger, phenomenological ontology is the method or discipline by which to understand properly all *Seienden*, including political ones.

However, Heidegger's phenomenological method is one at least in part shared by Strauss. Strauss's philosophical method, Socratic in nature, is to begin with how things appear to us in the context of political life. This 'political phenomenology' allows analysis of things in the world in terms of an evaluative framework, i.e., the way that political life determines those things to be. Strauss thus represents an advance on Heidegger's understanding, in the sense that Strauss's approach better satisfies the phenomenological

⁴ "Contrary to appearances, Socrates' turn to the study of human things was based, not upon disregard of the divine or natural things, but upon a new approach to the study of all things...Socrates deviated from his predecessors by identifying science of the whole, or of everything that is, with the understanding of 'what each of the beings is'" (NRH, 122).

dictum, 'to the things themselves!' If the objects of philosophy are inherently evaluative, and such evaluation is understood to be the foundation of all possible contexts of human life, the question of the best possible human life thus becomes the highest question of philosophy. Heidegger's thought, as the above analysis showed, does not permit even the asking of such a question, consigning it finally to the way in which *das Man* would understand human existence. If we are consistent phenomenologists, it seems we must side with Strauss and abandon the all-too-ontological methodology which Heidegger upholds. Strauss's philosophical trajectory ultimately points to ontology, but it begins in political life: "[t]he political is indeed not the highest, but it is the first, because it is the most urgent...[and] the human or political things are indeed the clue to all things, to the whole of nature, since they are the link or bond between the highest and the lowest, or since man is a microcosm, or since the human or political things and their corollaries are the form in which the highest principles first come to sight, or since the false estimate of human things is a fundamental or primary error" (RCPR, 133).

The specifically political element of the Straussian philosophical method is also the basis of Strauss's moral condemnation of Heidegger. Strauss's political-philosophical moral position is that of moderation, put forth as an antidote to unbridled Heideggerian radicalism which effectively eliminates the possibility of answering the question of the best human life, a question which a particular political situation answers concretely and definitively. This moral position shows Strauss's twofold understanding of the necessity of esotericism: in asking the question of the best possible human life, philosophical investigation both *can eliminate* the basis for stable political existence, and, due to this possibility, *can be eliminated* by the reigning political regime in order to preserve that regime. It can be stated that Strauss would wish at least the results of the Heideggerian

project of *Destruktion*, the desedimentation and subsequent radicalization of the history of philosophy, to continue, but with the added critical caveat of the politically moderate presentation of that project. This is the core meaning of Strauss's conservatism: the conservation of the philosophical power of a tradition of radical breaks with tradition, which, it must be stressed, would include Heidegger. In understanding the history of philosophy as a series of encounters with *Sein* rather than a series of philosophically necessary conflicts with political life, Heidegger cannot grasp the tension between philosophy and politics.⁵

The problem for the philosopher *qua* political citizen is that Strauss presumes the natural conservatism of the philosopher, i.e., he presumes that the philosopher will uphold the virtues of his or her current political situation, or at least not call them radically into question, even if, *qua* citizen, the philosopher believes those virtues to be misapplied or not applied at all. For example, the philosopher must respond with politically moderate speech even if the actions of his or her government clash with that government's stated constitutional principles. The philosopher may criticize, but only as 'gadfly,' for the concerns and ideals of political life are ultimately not those of the philosopher.⁶ For the philosopher, political life cannot offer the choice of the highest life as politics does not ask

⁵ "Because he denied the capacity of the philosopher to transcend his time and place, even in thought, because he argued, on the contrary, that the thinker or poet who understood his own-most condition authentically would see that his fate as an individual was inseparably linked to the destiny of his people, Heidegger did not recognize the anger the traditional authorities feel for the philosopher who challenges the love of their own and the need, therefore, to take precautions against arousing it" (Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 165-166). Or, Heidegger failed to understand the problem of Socrates because he did not take seriously enough the differences between the Socrates of Plato's dialogues with that of Aristophanes's *Clouds*.

⁶ This may indicate what Giorgio Agamben means when he says that "the restoration of classical political categories proposed by Leo Strauss...can only have a critical sense" (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 187). Agamben is right to claim Strauss as not believing 'classical politics' possible to reinstantiate. Rather, for Strauss, the questions of classical political philosophy remain our questions, and the answers of classical political philosophy remain one of the possible sets of answers that a zetetic philosopher must consider.

the question of the highest life—such an asking itself being the foundation of the highest life from the perspective of philosophy.

For some, Strauss's suggested political-philosophical position may not be satisfying, however. As a commentator observes, Strauss "realized that whereas in philosophy one can well proceed in perplexity, in moral and political life we must take a stand."⁷ In the first place, this statement results in a problem for those students of Strauss who consider themselves also to live in accordance with specific principles of social justice they believe to reflect the character of reality. Putting partisanship to one side, consideration of this statement also leads to a major dilemma concerning Strauss's moral critique of Heidegger. If Strauss is consistent philosophically, it seems that he cannot morally critique Heidegger as a philosopher; he can only morally critique Heidegger as a political human being. The Straussian philosopher *qua* philosopher is necessarily amoral, and the moral position that he or she suggests is ultimately for the sake of political palatability. It would only be possible to mount a moral criticism from the perspective of philosophy if knowledge of natural right is in Strauss's possession, and Strauss has shown this is not, and for the zetetic philosopher cannot be, the case.⁸ If Strauss's moral critique is shown to lack philosophical (not, it must be stressed, political-philosophical) justification, and if Heidegger represents the most extreme radicalization of modern tendencies which, Strauss suggests, must be considered zetetically, then all of which we can be sure

⁷ Stuart Umphrey, "Natural Right and Philosophy," in Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, 291.

⁸ One possible way to justify Strauss's moral critique from a strictly philosophical perspective is that Heidegger's thought truly constitutes the 'second cave,' as this prevents philosophical investigation as Strauss understands it from beginning. The 'second cave' prevents the proper parameters of the question of the best way of living for human beings from coming into view, i.e., the question of the decision to live in accordance with reason or to live in pious obedience to the revealed law. Thus, for Strauss, Heidegger's thought prevents attaining "the one thing needful" (NRH, 74), whichever that thing may be. This is only tenuously a 'moral' critique, however.

concerning his view of Heidegger is his praise of Heidegger's philosophical ability and profundity.

One might add that these observations lead us to question the solidity of Strauss's criticism of Heidegger's immoderation. If philosophy is characterized in private by mania, as Strauss believes it to be, it may be the case that only his politically conservative and moderate temperament led him to critique Heidegger in the way that he did. Since Strauss was a proponent of esoteric writing as the method by which to conceal philosophical mania from political life, it is possible to understand Strauss's critique of Heidegger as ultimately merely exoteric. The Straussian philosopher veils the lack of a natural or eternal basis for political life, i.e., the absence of a natural or eternal basis for the life of the ordinary individual, and thus protects politics from philosophy; the Heideggerian philosopher or 'thinker' reveals this absence, and thus permits philosophical speculation to subvert the foundation of political stability. This absence at the heart of everyday life has a different theoretical character for each thinker. The 'abyss,' however, remains for practical or political life the same. For Strauss, the solution is esoteric writing,⁹ which holds theory and practice apart and hence protects each from the withering effect of the other. For Heidegger, theory and practice are not separable, and hence the theoretical abyss necessarily leads to a practical one: there is no possibility to discover the best possible human life, as, authentically speaking, there are only historically-determined lives which form the locus of human possibility. This understanding is reflected in Strauss's statement, quoted in chapter 1, that Heidegger "declared that ethics is impossible and his whole being was permeated by the awareness that this fact opens up an abyss" ("Existentialism," 304).

⁹ Rosen astutely observes that Strauss's distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric is finally "all too close to the nihilism it seeks to avoid" (*Nihilism*, 215), i.e., all too close to Heidegger.

Such a statement also shows Strauss's admiration for Heidegger's consistency and philosophical courage. Strauss's critique of Heidegger, understood in the fashion of this thesis, remains and must necessarily remain ambivalent.

We conclude by noting one possible path following from the above analysis. The problem of truth, especially concerning its value for human life, is for us coeval with the problem of how to understand the crises, both philosophical and political, through which Heidegger and Strauss lived and whose paroxysms we continue to experience today. As was mentioned at the very beginning of our discussion, both thinkers viewed their respective philosophical and political situations as ones of crisis, and believed their respective projects as the means by which to overcome those crises. Thus, the aporetic end of this thesis leads naturally to a consideration of perhaps the most important philosophical diagnostician of the contemporary age and its nihilistic malaise, as well as perhaps the most important theorizer of the value of truth for human existence: Nietzsche. Both Heidegger and Strauss can be viewed as taking philosophical direction from Nietzsche's analysis, even when considering the wide divergence of their subsequent paths. I thus conclude my thesis by mentioning that Heidegger's and Strauss's respective receptions of Nietzsche, focusing on the exemplar texts of "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'" (Heidegger, 1943) and "A Note on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*" (Strauss, 1973), is the place to begin in order to show the direction in which the trajectory of analysis started in this thesis continues.

Heidegger understands Nietzsche to be the 'last metaphysician,' and as such, someone who "never recognized the *essence* of nihilism, like every other metaphysics [*sic*] before him" (*Off the Beaten Track*, 197; GA 5, 264). In accordance with his understanding of the history of philosophy, Heidegger thus understands Nietzsche in relation to the *Seinsfrage*, thereby emphasizing the metaphysical character of Nietzsche's thought which

obscures the *Seinsfrage*. In order to move beyond Nietzsche, it is necessary to understand Nietzsche as remaining trapped in an understanding of *Sein* as the *Sein des Seienden*, and Nietzsche, as the ‘last metaphysician,’ exemplifies the tendencies of metaphysics which have caused, in Heidegger’s view, the crisis in which humanity finds itself.

Conversely, Strauss understands Nietzsche most fundamentally to contribute to an understanding of the problem of nature. This problem, as was indicated in chapter 3 of this thesis, is the crux of the debate between Heidegger’s and Strauss’s positions. More importantly, Strauss notes that Nietzsche’s treatment of the problem of nature is to be understood in relation to the theologico-political problem. For Nietzsche, “there is an order of rank of the natures” of human beings (SPPP, 190). From this claim, the question of human nature immediately becomes a political problem: what is the best way of life, and what is the best regime which permits this way of life to exist and to thrive? Secondly, the question of nature brings us immediately to the origin of that nature, i.e., whether it is ultimately divine in character. In Nietzsche, for Strauss, “[d]ie vornehme Natur ersetzt die göttliche Natur” (SPPP, 191), or ‘noble nature replaces godly nature.’ Strauss notes that “‘Vornehm’ differs from ‘noble’ because it is inseparable from extraction, origin, birth” (SPPP, 190-191). Taking into account Strauss’s understanding of the development of the problem of natural right in opposition to the conventional legislation of the understanding of things, and that such conventional legislation must attempt to convince those who live in accordance with it of its divine origin, Nietzsche thus points us directly to the theologico-political problem in a way that Heidegger cannot.

Of course, this is only a start. Much more needs to be said about both thinkers’ respective responses to Nietzsche, as well as their respective responses to the thought of whom each thinker views as the ultimate origin of our contemporary situation, namely

Plato. Such an investigation is, I propose, ultimately the avenue through which to understand fully the respective projects of Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger, and it is the avenue which I suggest requires immediate and thorough contemplation. It is to the great credit of both Strauss and Heidegger that the thought of Plato and Nietzsche, the thought which has determined the history of philosophy both in the past and today, has been transformed into a question. It is hoped that, in this thesis, I have contributed, if not necessarily to answering, then at least to clarifying that question.

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